

# MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH

L.S. BUXI





# *Maharaja Ranjit Singh*

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Translation : Ajit Uniyal

**PUBLICATIONS DIVISION  
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING  
NEW DELHI**

March 1992 (*Chaitra* 1914)



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Price: Rs. 12.00

**PUBLISHED BY THE DIRECTOR, PUBLICATIONS DIVISION,  
MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING,  
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA, PATIALA HOUSE, NEW DELHI-110001**

**Sales Emporia      Publications Division**

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Printed at : Aravali Printers & Publishers Pvt. Ltd.. W-30 Okhla, Industrial Area,  
Phase II, New Delhi-110020

## About this Edition

Those days in North India sojourn of *Kohinoor* had become an ample test of the might and stability of an empire. The *Kohinoor* adorned the crown that deserved it and it adorned the crown of Maharaja Ranjit Singh for many many long years. His empire was stable and mighty as it was founded on talent and ability. Himself equipped with exceptional acumen, Maharaja had a keen insight of spotting the talent. The men in his service were drawn from all quarters--French, German, Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and other communities. Even though himself a devout follower of Sikh faith, his rule perfectly meets the parameters of true secularism. His religious endowments were meant for religious institutions of all hues with full freedom of faith to one and all.

Yet there is much more to show his proximity to ideals of present day Indian nationalism. Many other *rajas* and *nawabs* also fought against the Britishers chiefly for self-preservation and ultimately fell to their intrigues. But this was Rajnit Singh who aroused the first spark of consciousness that Britishers were aliens to Indian land. He did his best to keep them in check. But for his mighty presence the Britishers would have swallowed entire North India long ago.

Already published in Punjabi and Hindi, the edition at hand throws light on above and various other facets of the times and legacy of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Thanks to the decision of Dr. S.S. Shashi, Director and Shri V. Sripathi Rao, Joint Director to bring out English edition, the book now will be within the reach of many more readers. Translation

from original has been done by Shri Ajit Uniyal. My thanks are also due to Shri B.S. Dhingra Editor, who has put in immense efforts to maintain the originality of treatment. A few informative and supporting photographs have been inserted to make the book interesting and fascinating.

Suggestions from readers for further improvement are welcome.

--Author

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## Introduction

MAHARAJA RANJIT SINGH has been described as Sher-e-Punjab, the Lion of Punjab. During his adolescence he killed barehanded a lion at Gujranwala, and the place till date is known as the Sheranwala Bagh or the garden of lions. The reason for this popular synonym is that he was a lion-hearted person, heroic warrior and the legendary ruler of Punjab. It would not be correct to call him the Maharaja of Punjab, as his empire extended not over the villages and towns of the state but his domain in reality was the hearts of the people, he ruled and loved. It would be more appropriate to call him the Maharaja of the Punjabis. He was in reality a symbol of the Punjabi culture and a typical representative of the Punjabi folk.

While paying tributes to Ranjit Singh, many of the historians and chroniclers have called him the Napoleon of Asia, compared him with Bismarck, Cromwell and Mehmet Ali. In the History of Punjab, T.H. Thornton has said:

"Ranjit Singh has been likened to Mehmet Ali, to Napoleon. Mr. Jacquemont terms him a Bonaparte in miniature. There are some points in which he resembles both; but estimating his character, with reference to his circumstances and position, he is perhaps, a more remarkable man than either".

Marshman who has written three volumes of the history of India says about him:

"He was the most extraordinary man of the age between Constantinople and Peking."

Physically the Maharaja was not a tall person but due to his extraordinary achievements he occupies a unique place in the history of Punjab, thereby he becomes a stalwart figure, who raised his head with dignity and honour. According to Emily Eden, the Sister

of Lord Auckland who had accompanied her brother to India, Ranjit Singh did not appear to be very impressive, while sitting in his golden chair, but it was a sight to watch him riding his favourite stallion when he always appeared as the attractive and shrewd young warrior. Even in his court, he preferred not to occupy the throne. On the other hand, he always relished to sit on the carpet, resting his back on a velvet cushion, surrounded by his people, courtiers and advisors. Though this style of functioning was rather ordinary and tended to depict him as an ordinary person instead of the king, but he liked it and always behaved like one of them. This perhaps was the secret of his popularity. He never considered himself different from his people even when he was sitting among his ministers, nobles, advisors or the officials he would cut jokes and share his heartfelt sentiments with them. During his rule, the people of the Punjab entered upon a period of internal peace, prosperity which they had not enjoyed for several generations.

During his childhood Ranjit Singh lost his left eye due to smallpox. His white and shaggy beard, covered a considerable portion of his pockmarked face and gave an impressive look to his short and stout physique which tended to be more on the bulky side. Yet he had an impressive personality that commanded respect from beholders. The visitors and spectators to his court, always became his ardent admirers. Once one of his envoys, who was on a visit to the British Court was asked by one of the officers in a jovial manner:

“We understand that your Maharaja has one eye only. Which one of his eyes is missing?”

“Sir, I don’t know.”

“But Why? Don’t you ever see him?”

“No, It is not that. Even though, I see His Highness every day, yet the grace of the Royal Countenance is such that one does not dare to look straight into his eyes.”

According to Mc Gregor:

“His remaining eye is very large and there is a fire and brilliancy about it when he becomes animated, which at once discovers the energetic mind and discriminating character of its owner. His smile

is pleasing and his manner of address easy and unembarrassed on all occasions. He never appears at a loss for words to express his ideas which are quickly formed on any subject."

It is not astonishing to learn that all this has been said about a person who was totally illiterate. Ranjit Singh was a brave warrior and an able cavalier. He spent all his life in the battlefield, the greater part of which he was on the horseback. Never for a moment he was terror struck or panicky. Perhaps the word fear never existed in his vocabulary. He loved to wear ordinary clothes. Silken *Kurta* and *Pyjama* with an ordinary head gear, was his routine. With exception of special occasions, he never wore jewellery. It is different that his courtiers dressed themselves in fine clothes. Dr. K.K. Khullar in his book *Maharaja Ranjit Singh* has said :

"According to all English accounts, Ranjit Singh's Court excelled in the world; as the court with the finest looking and best dressed person."

Ranjit Singh's personality was impressive and his manners, charming. In his book *The court and camp of Ranjit Singh*, Osborne observes:

"Ranjit Singh cannot fail to strike every one as that of a very extraordinary man.....The more I see of him, the more he strikes me as an extraordinary man."

Those were the times, when the Rajas and the Maharajas wore the *Kamdar Zari* clothes, studded with diamonds and pearls in golden lace and silken thread. But Hugel observes, he never saw him wear any embroidery, brocade or rich ornaments of any sort. The bracelet studded with 'Kohinoor' was worn by him only on special occasions.

After he was free from the exacting demands of the state affairs, he liked to participate in the games and enjoyed fun and frolic. Hunting was his favourite occupation. The area between the rivers Sutlej and Ravi was reserved for this purpose. The Maharaja would set out on hunting sprees accompanied by cavaliers, body-guards and soldiers. Usually the game started in the afternoon. The Maharaja was also accompanied by a team of trained hounds. Falcons were also used to chase and scare away the small animals like rabbits and birds. In the first instance they would set the falcon

after the prey. The falcon would tire out the animal with constant chase and then pounce upon it. Sometimes the animal was captured after it had been injured by the powerful claws and the sharp merciless beak of the falcon. Then the hounds would take over. Ranjit Singh liked to fight the lions and tigers, with his sword and shield. The guns were not used for this purpose, whenever a tiger was taken by any of his men, he would reward him generously and praise him publicly.

While analysing the popularity of Ranjit Singh with his subjects, one finds that he had adopted a secular approach towards them. He was democratic in his administration and as an individual he was considerably liberal and a generous monarch, who had the knack of owning and endearing people. A historian from Pakistan Wahid-ud-din has paid touching tributes to him. He says:

"His name is still a household word in the province. His portrait is still preserved in castle and in cottage. It is a favourite subject with the ivory painters of Amritsar and Delhi.

Ranjit Singh still lives, large as life, in the imagination of the people. He does so, not only where the Sikhs now live, but also where they lived before; for, the Muslim village-folks shared him as a legendary figure with the Sikhs and they have not let him depart with the latter.

Ranjit Singh's popular image is that of a kindly patriarch rather than that of a conquering hero or a mighty monarch. He was all there, but his humanity has outlived his splendour and power."

Whereas I have quoted above some of the important passages from some of the well known historians of the Sikh history, I feel it is my proud privilege to refer to the writings of some of our thinkers, philosophers and statesmen of today, highlighting the character of this unmatchable figure of our history. Saravapalli Dr. Radha Krishnan says:

"Maharaja Ranjit Singh succeeded by personal valour and fair treatment in welding desperate elements into a well-knit kingdom which maintained its integrity and independence against difficult odds. At a time like the present, when national integration is receiving so much attention, we should remind

ourselves of the policies and principles which this great leader followed in instilling a sense of unity among his people irrespective of their differences in religion, custom and tradition. His example should inspire the present generation."

Dr. Zakir Hussain the third president of India was also a scholar and educationist. He has paid glowing tributes to Ranjit Singh in the following words:

"Great personalities are the most potent agencies of national education. Maharaja Ranjit Singh was such a personality for India--one of the most outstanding ones during the 19th century. His force of character, his shrewdness, his statesmanship, his heroic courage, his large hearted tolerance, his secular impartiality and benevolence, stand out against the dismal background of our national decline. They stand out to sustain us in the formative years of our young national state."

Last but not the least, reference may be made to the observation of Smt. Indira Gandhi, the late Prime Minister of India, who during the 2nd Centenary celebrations of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, had sent the following message to the Government of Punjab, which has been included in the commemoration volume.

"Maharaja Ranjit Singh is one of the outstanding men that our land has produced. Every school child knows him as the Lion of Punjab. His brilliance as a general and his statesmanship as a ruler have become household words ..... I hope that the people of Punjab and the country at large will imbibe his message of unity and tolerance, courage and steadfastness."

In the present period of turbulence, national and emotional integration has become the need of the hour that is why the message of Ranjit Singh seems to be more relevant to-day as compared to his period. He had established his government on secular principles, where Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Christians and others were equal partners of progress. He offered equal opportunity to all to serve without any difference of caste, creed and religion. Temples, mosques, and other places of worship were equally revered by him. He offered his royal patronage to the observance of festivals of all communities at the national level. He was much above the bigotry and treated each community with equal benevolence and generosity.

Unity, equality and fraternity were the basic principles of his rule. The aim of producing the present monograph is to present these noble ideals of Ranjit Singh to our present generation, which would also continue to serve as the guiding stars, in the times to come.

## *Historical Background*

THE PERIOD (1708-1780) FOLLOWING the demise of Guru Gobind Singh and preceding the rise of Maharaja Ranjit Singh represents a confused phase of the history of Punjab. The sun of the Mogul power was steadily sinking, while a new power was on the ascent in Punjab. Historians have described this period as one of the Sikh *Misls*.

A *Misl* was a kind of confederacy--a large family or clan. The word probably is derived from the Arabic *musalahat*, meaning an armed organization. Some of the more famous *Misls* were Ramgarhia, Ahluwalia, Faizalpuria, Kanahaiya, Dalewalia, Nakai, Bhangi, Shukarchakia and Phulkia. Cunningham lists twelve of them. Ranjit Singh belonged to the Shukarchakia *Misl*.

After the death of Guru Gobind Singh, Banda Bahadur took over the leadership of the Sikhs. He even minted coins in the name of Guru Nanak and Guru Gobind Singh. Though the star of Banda Bahadur shone in the sky of Punjab only for a short while, he nevertheless laid the foundations of the Khalsa Raj. He generated a new political awareness among the Sikhs and determined the course of their future history. He brought all the Khalsa groups under the one flag. His army had in its ranks not only Sikhs but also Hindus and Muslims, who all fought shoulder to shoulder. Even Mogul sources attest to this. One such source is *Akhbar-i-Durbar-i-Maulla* a chronicle of events that was compiled for submission to the Mogul court and a copy of which is preserved in the Jaipur archives.

Banda Bahadur was truly a brave commander, inspiring pride among his followers, who were ever ready to lay down their lives at a nod from him. A Mogul spy, who sent regular daily reports

to *shahanshah*, records:

"Till the 9th of this month, this wretched fellow (Banda Bahadur) had been camping at Kalanor. During this period he proclaimed many times that he did not approve of any excesses being committed against Muslims. He has even sanctioned doles for Muslims. He has given them permission to offer *namaz* and read the *khutba*. This has resulted in five thousand Muslims joining his army. Under his protection Muslim soldiers of his army can give the call for prayer and offer *namaz*...."

This was at a time when a decree, issued by Emperor Bahadur Shah on 10 December, 1710, required that wherever a Sikh was encountered he should be put to the sword.

After the martyrdom of Banda Bahadur, another decree was issued by Farrukhsiar, which said:

"If any officer of my kingdom arrests a Sikh, he should first ask the latter to embrace Islam. If he refuses he should be beheaded. Anyone bringing the head of a Sikh will be generously rewarded."

Soon the Sikh *Misls* were driven to seek shelter in caves and forests. But they had been made courageous and indomitable by the *amrit* that Guru Gobind Singh had administered to them and they could still sing:

*Jo toe prem khelan ka chao  
Sir dhar talee galee mori aao  
It marag paer dharije  
Sir deeje kan na keeje*

If you desire to play the game of love, then place your beheaded skull on your palm before entering my lane. Once the path is treading, then there is no going back without offering your head.

Confined as each *Misl* was to its own small territory, there was nevertheless a feeling of oneness. They were all closely related, whether in friendship or enmity. Every man, woman and child carried arms. They would come in hordes on horseback, ravage and plunder an unprotected countryside with lightning speed and vanish. According to a chronicler: "When Nadir Shah passed through Punjab on his way back home after his campaign of plunder and genocide, some Sikhs were pointed out to him. 'Who are they, and where do they live?' he asked. 'Sir', he was told, 'they are Sikhs'

and their homes are on the backs of their horses.' Nadir Shah remarked in Persian, 'They smell of kingly power.' It was a prophetic observation.

At the time Nadir Shah ascended the throne, the Mogul empire in India was crumbling, and the first thing he did as king was to abet Ahmedshah Durrani to march on India with a large army. The outrages that Ahmedshah perpetrated during the campaign still make one's hair stand on end. He raised hecatombs of human skulls and boasted that the size of these hecatombs would make men tremble at the very mention of his name.

A story is told that illustrated the mental state of men in that age of rapine and murder. It is said that an old man, exhausted by fatigue and hunger and dressed as a Nihang, passed by a young boy as he trudged along.

"Whither are you bound, Grandfather?" the boy asked him.

The old man looked at the boy. His hair was cropped. So he was not a Sikh.

"How does that concern you?"

"Well," said the boy, "I can see that you are tired. May be I can be of some service to you."

"Yes, I am tired and I am hungry."

"In that case shall I bring you something to eat?"

"Well, if the provender is ready, bring it. That will give me pleasure. But, first, who are you?"

"Grandfather, I am the son of Hakim Khan, the headman of this village."

"So you are a Turk," the old man said, swearing at the boy. "How dare you offer me food? We do not eat at the hands of Muslims."

"But Grandfather, you are hungry and the food is ready."

"In that case get me a horse and saddle it; then walk along carrying the basket of food on your head. I shall attack you from horseback and snatch the food from you. If the arrangement suits you, well and good, if not, be on your way."

Such was the temper of the Sikhs--at a time when they were forced to move place to place to save their lives. As has been said, the organizations they had evolved were called the *misl*s. The leader

of the *misl* was a veteran, seasoned in many battles and endowed with great courage. He was answerable for the safety of the women and children of the *misl* as well as of the goods and chattels. He was also responsible for the management of the provisions, gunpowder, etc. He took out young men of the *misl* on periodical forays into distant territories and brought back what ever plunder he could. The group lived peacefully till the booty was exhausted. Then they again issued forth, on another mission of plunder.

## *The Family Background*

SUCH WERE THE conditions when, on 20 November, 1780, Ranjit was born to the wife of Sardar Maha Singh of the Shukarchakia *Misl* at Gujranwala. Maha Singh at the time was 20 years old and was away on a military campaign. The Shukarchakia *Misl* derived its name from the village Shukarchak. The founder of this *Misl* was Charat Singh, the grandfather of Ranjit Singh. Charat Singh was a brave leader of men. He had started out as a farmer. Later, blessed by a *mahatma*, he took to trading in horses, the vocation he supplemented by plunder. Very soon he found himself at the head of a force of four or five hundred horsemen. He raided and gradually occupied many areas, and then, to consolidate his conquests and further increase his power, ventured forth on matrimonial alliances. He gave his daughter in marriage to Saheb Singh, son of Hujur Singh of Gujrat, Chief of the Bhangi *Misl* and affianced his son to the daughter of Raja Gajpat Singh of Jind. These alliances greatly increased the power of Charat Singh, which enabled him still further to widen his territorial annexations.

Charat Singh made all those wearing long hair and beards to partake *amrit* and then recruited them into his army. In this way he soon built up a sizeable army of trusted fighters. Wherever he took them, they returned victorious. From the conquered territories he levied a tax called "rakhee", or protection money. To govern the areas he appointed persons loyal to him as administrators. The revenues of the areas went to those administrators, so that the areas were in a way their estate or *jagir*.

Before Charat Singh died, he had enlarged his domain to include all of Gujranwala and the area to the north of the *tehsil*. He was the master of Quila Didar Singh, Qila Mian Singh and

Quila Saheb Singh, and he had started hit-and-run skirmishes with reputed Muslim chieftains.

According to a district gazetteer of Gujranwala Distt. brought out by the British administration in Punjab in 1883-84, Charat Singh died in 1767, shot by his own gun. His son Maha Singh was then a little boy of seven. So his Dewan took over the reins of administration as ruler. On coming of age Maha Singh mobilized an army of 60,000 horsemen. On the day, Ranjit Singh was born Maha Singh conquered the fort of Rasoolgarh. The family priest had suggested the name of the new born as Budh Singh, but to mark his victory Maha Singh named him Ranjit Singh (Conqueror of battlefield).

Maha Singh carried forward his father's policy of territorial expansion. In pursuit of this policy he entered into various matrimonial alliances. Jai Singh of the Kanahaiya *Misl* was one of the most powerful men at the time. Maha Singh affianced Ranjit Singh to Mahtab Kaur, the granddaughter of Jai Singh and that measure considerably strengthened his position.

G. Forester, an officer of the East India Company, happened to be in Punjab in 1783, when Ranjit Singh was a child of three years. In his work, *A Journey from Bengal to England*. Forester writes: "The Sikhs are an industrious, warlike and brave people. Today they may be divided into different clans, but the day is not far off when a great leader will rise among them, unite Punjab, which is fragmented today, and raise a new edifice on the present ruins. Before very long the Sikhs are going to emerge as the dominant power in the region, whose might and influence will be felt in the adjacent countries."

By a coincidence of history, Ranjit Singh, too, was only seven when Maha Singh died. Maha Singh had been a valiant soldier and Ranjit Singh had inherited his courage. His mother was a daughter of the Jind family. Ranjit Singh had thus imbibed heroic qualities from his mother. He ascended the throne at the age of eight years. Lakhpur Rai, the Dewan, assumed charge of the administration as ruler. Ranjit Singh's mother and his mother-in-law Sada Kaur became the guardians of the boy. Lakhpur Rai set about consolidating his personal power by arrogating to himself more and more

authority. This made even Ranjit Singh's mother fear him. She was concerned lest her son's position be imperilled. She therefore acquiesced more and more with the wishes of the Dewan. When Ranjit Singh grew a little older, it began to strike him that the relationship between the Dewan and his mother was somewhat curious. He removed both from all positions of authority. Some historians assert that his mother was poisoned. According to Smyth, Ranjit Singh himself executed his mother. However, this does not seem to be true. Perhaps the English historian wanted to paint Raj Kaur as a characterless woman. The historian, N.K. Sinha has rejected it. He writes in his book *Ranjit Singh* (p. 209). "This story is hardly credible. Smyth, he says, records bizarre rumours. His reliance on uncorroborated hearsay evidence makes him undependable."

In the Sikh annals the image of Sada Kaur, Ranjit Singh's mother-in-law, is of a warrior lady, who took part in battles dressed as a man, and displayed such valour and fighting skill that she drew admiration even from the foe. She was extremely ambitious. She had long nursed the dream of taking over the leadership of the Kanahaiya *Misl* on the demise of her father-in-law Jai Singh, and now seeing that her son-in-law Ranjit Singh was still young and inexperienced, she also began to dream of ruling over whole of Punjab.

From early childhood Ranjit Singh had to face a situation of political turmoil and personal enmities which it was necessary for him to overcome. He had inherited not only extensive territories, but also political sagacity of a high order. Expansionist ambitions ran in the family. His grandfather Charat Singh, and after him his father Maha Singh both had to resort to the sword and matrimonial diplomacy, succeeded in acquiring vast territories, and from being mere brigand chiefs risen to the dignity of *Rajas*. They had ruled with aplomb and ruled well. Their subjects included Hindus and Muslims as much as Sikhs.

Northern India was at the time reeling under the repeated onslaughts of Ahmedshah Abdali. This Afghan freebooter had gone about his task of pillage so thoroughly and mercilessly that a saying had gained currency that, "what you ate was yours, the rest belonged

to Abdali." Then in 1795, 1797 and 1798 India was ravaged by the raids carried out by his grandson Shah Zaman. In all the three campaigns it was Ranjit Singh alone who resisted and harassed him through sustained guerilla operations and forced him to retreat. Ranjit Singh's strategy was -- On getting the intelligence of the march of the Afghan marauder, the Sikh fighters would make for the jungles and let the Afghan hordes penetrate deep into their territory. Then through a pincer movement they would surround the enemy and pouncing upon him with lightning movement, spread death and destruction in his ranks and vanish into the jungles before he had time to regroup. The enemy would imagine that the worst was over and proceed on the march. The Sikhs would again swoop down on them and kill as many as before. Ratan Singh, the Sikh historian, has called his method of fighting "two and a half hits". The first hit consisted in surprising the enemy when he would be least expecting an attack; the second consisted in quickly retreating before the enemy had mobilized his forces, while at the same time inflicting as much damage on him as possible, which was the last half-hit.

Shah Zaman could not withstand these persistent guerilla attack from Ranjit Singh's force and fled for shelter into the Lahore fort. But Ranjit Singh would not let him stay there in peace. Every morning he marched with a small force to the fort and facing the ramparts, shout challenges to Shah Zaman to come out and fight. He continued the pressure for three days.

## *He Conquers Lahore*

LAHORE BEING A strategically important town, Ranjit Singh made up his mind to conquer it. He held secret consultations with the Hindu and Muslim inhabitants of the town and ordered a night assault on Lahore with his mother-in-law Sada Kaur leading the operation. Lahore at that time was divided in three zones, with three different Bhangi chiefs ruling in each. Their names were Sobha Singh, Lahena Singh and Gujar Singh. Gujar Singh's fort is still standing near the Lahore railway station.

The people of Lahore had no sympathy for Shah Zaman, who had perpetrated untold atrocities on them. The tyranny of the three ruling chiefs had also greatly antagonized them. They therefore lent full support to Ranjit Singh, who took the town with the greatest ease. On the successful conclusion of the battle on 7 July, 1799, Ranjit Singh issued an order to the officers of his army in the following terms: "Lahore is our own territory. Its inhabitants are our kin. They must be treated with respect. Anyone found indulging in plunder or using force against the people or ill-treating them will be severely punished." An account of the episode is to be found in Khushwant Singh's, *Maharaja Ranjit Singh Death Centenary Memorial*.

Ranjit Singh preferred to call his kingdom the Lahore Durbar rather than a Sikh kingdom. In 1799 some Sardars, among them Jussa Singh Ramgarhia, Gulab Singh Bhangi of Amritsar, Saheb Singh Bhangi of Gujrat and Jodh Singh of Wazirabad, made an attempt to wrest Lahore from Ranjit Singh. They were assisted by Nizamuddin of Kasur. They attacked Lahore for four months. But Ranjit Singh deployed his forces with such skill that Lahore escaped any kind of damage and the besieging forces had to withdraw. On

their retreat Jussa Singh Ramgarhia's forces were checked by the forces of Sada Kaur and Ranjit Singh. In the combat that ensued Ranjit Singh's forces gained the upper hand. This was Ranjit Singh's first victory, and the year was 1800.

Encouraged by this victory, Ranjit Singh marched on Jammu. The Sardar of Viroval offered him a tribute of eight thousand rupees, which was accepted. Ranjit Singh's armies first took the fort of Jassalwal and then advanced on Jammu. Five miles outside the town the Raja of Jammu met Ranjit Singh, welcomed him and offered him a huge tribute. Ranjit Singh then turned back. On the way he attacked and occupied the territories of Sialkot and took its Raja Dal Singh, captive. He was the maternal uncle of Ranjit Singh's father. When Ranjit Singh attacked Atulgarh, the wife of Dal Singh took the field at the head of an army and resisted him. Ranjit Singh lifted the siege of the town and moved towards Dilawargarh. Kesari Singh, the Raja of the place, capitulated and surrendered the fort, at the same time signing a treaty with Ranjit Singh. He gave him a large tract in *jagir*. When finally Ranjit Singh returned to Lahore he had become the master of large, freshly acquired territories.

In 1801, the generals of the army, as well as many notables and prominent citizens representing Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, persuaded Ranjit Singh to hold a coronation ceremony at Lahore. It had been a custom among the Sikhs to have a Sarbat Khalsa (conclave) every year on the Baisakhi day, to which delegates came from all the *Misls* and where *gurmatas* (resolutions) were passed. The day of Baisakhi was therefore chosen as the most auspicious day for the coronation of Ranjit Singh. Rulers of many neighbouring states were invited, including the East India Company. The Lahore fort was the venue of the spectacle. Baba Khem Singh Bedi, sporting the robes of the Royal Priest, applied saffron *Tilak* on the forehead of Ranjit Singh, who now assumed the title of Maharaja. He received gifts from the assembled guests--diplomats, military commanders and citizens and he made lavish donations to temples, mosques and gurdwaras. In all places of worship prayers were offered for his long life. Ranjit Singh's "Sanjha Raj" (commonwealth) was inaugurated. He never intended it, as Sikh rule or his personal rule.

In his view the Lahore Durbar symbolized individual freedom and national unity. Though monarchical in form, it was democratic in content. It was a commonwealth.

But there were urgent problems to tackle. Borders now stretching very far out, had to be secured, the administration and the army organization had to be put on a sound footing; major appointments had to be made. Ranjit Singh gave his immediate attention to these problems. In the matter of appointments, merit was made the sole criterion and any kind of communal discrimination was totally eschewed.

Ranjit Singh was a humane and popular ruler. He never awarded death penalty to anyone. In his kingdom individual and religious freedom was guaranteed to all and all disputes were settled by reference to this principle. Disputes among Muslims were thus settled by Kazis and Maulvis in accordance with the *shariat*, as had been the practice during the Mogul times. Hindu and Sikh wrong doers were similarly tried and sentenced according to Hindu and Sikh traditions.

To safeguard Islamic traditions in his kingdom Ranjit Singh brought the various Muslim sects into one organization and made Kazi Nizamuddin the head of this organization. In his capacity of a sovereign, Ranjit Singh himself was the supreme head of all these sects and in all religious matters his verdict was final. To assist Kazi Nizamuddin, Mufti Mohammed Shah was appointed as adviser. In litigations involving religious matters it was his function to brief Kazi Nizamuddin on points of civil and criminal law. He was in a way the government advocate. Imam Bux was appointed city Kotwal, with the entire police force of the city under him. Ranjit Singh was a secular ruler. Though he consulted and considered religious opinion in administrative matters he placed much greater faith in the sense of duty, dedication, efficiency and ability of his officers. He respected merit in his officers. The ranks of his army were open to all--Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs--without any considerations of language, region or community. The army included Punjabis, Dogras, Jats, Rajputs, Rohillas and Pathans. He employed Afghan, English, French and German military advisers. His Prime Minister was Raja Dhyan Singh Dogra and his Foreign Minister

was a Muslim, Fakir Azizuddin. His finance minister Dewan Bhawani Das was a Hindu. Lala Sawan Mal was the governor of Multan, Avitabile was the governor of Peshawar and Dewan Moti Ram was the governor of Kashmir. The Kiladar of Amritsar and the city Kotwal of Lahore were Muslims. The Maharaja's own bodyguards were all Muslims. They were all excellent horsemen and wore tall, crested turbans. Of the generals of the army Dewan Mohkam Chand and Misar Dewan Chand were Hindus, Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa and Akali Phula Singh were Sikhs and Venture and Allard were Christians. Among prominent Sikh generals were S. Sham Singh Attariwala, Sher Singh Attariwala, S. Lehen Singh Majithia and General Dhawan Singh Malwai. His artillery was manned by many Muslim officers.

A decree issued in Persian and bearing the date 31 Bhadra, 1882 of the Vikrama era, bears testimony of the secular character of Ranjit Singh's rule. The decree was issued in the name of Nur Din, the Home Minister, and ran as follows:

"No one must subject anyone to any kind of coercion and no excesses should be committed against anyone. If any order issued by the Maharaja's government is found to be unjust, it should immediately be brought to the notice of the authorities so that it can be amended.... All court decisions must carry the sanction of equity. Those with just claims should be given their due in full. Rulings should be based on the advice of the Panchs and the Kazis and should show due respect to the traditions and tenets of the parties in the dispute."

The well-known historian Syed Wahiduddin records:

"Ranjit Singh followed the policy of allowing the fullest freedom to everybody to follow the ways of his own faith. During his rule there was goodwill between the followers of different faiths and perfect religious amity."

It is said that once some Nihangs went to the Maharaja and complained that Mallas' calls from mosques every morning disturbed their sleep. "Why did they do so?" the Maharaja asked.

"To summon the faithful to prayer."

"In that case you yourselves can go from house to house and summon people for *namaz*. The Mallas then will have no need to

give the calls."

This was a difficult condition for the Nihangs to fulfil and they withdrew the suit.

Another important question was the minting of coins. In an autocracy coins are struck in the names of reigning Rajas or Nawabs. But in the coins issued during Ranjit Singh's reign his name finds no mention. They carried instead the name of Guru Nanak and are therefore described as Nanakshahi coins.

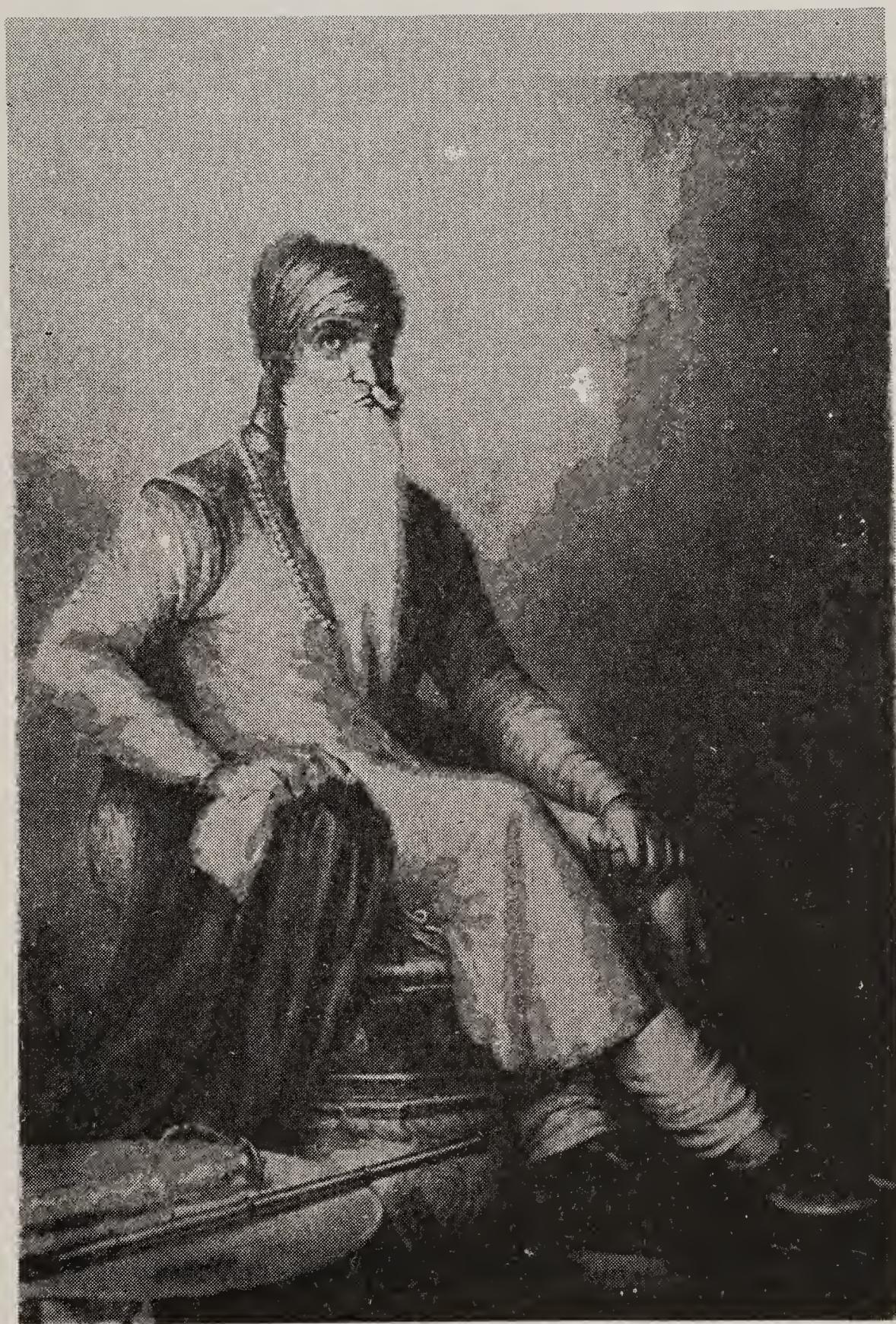
The highest-denomination coin was a gold sovereign which is said to have weighed 10 Mashas and 6 Rattis. The rupee was cast in silver and weighed 10 Mashas and 2 Rattis. It carried on one face the name of Guru Nanak in Gurmukhi and Persian and on the other face the image of Guru Nanak with his two Hindu and Muslim disciples Bala and Mardana.

Some coins also carried the inscription "Darul Sultanate Lahore". Even government seals did not carry Ranjit Singh's name.

## *The Conquest of Amritsar*

IN 1802 AMRITSAR was being ruled by the chieftains of the Bhangi *Misl*. They were smarting under the hurt Ranjit Singh had caused them by his annexation of Lahore and were secretly planning an assault on Lahore. Ranjit Singh, with his wide intelligence network, was soon made wise to the move, and in a pre-emptive action, ordered his army to march on Amritsar. He was supported by the forces of Sada Kaur and Sardar Fateh Singh of the Ahluwalia *Misl*. The Bhangi sardars secured the gates of the city wall and turned their artillery on the invading forces. Ranjit Singh could have retaliated in like manner, but he considered the city sacred and refrained from using his guns. Fortunately for him, a group of prominent citizens of Amritsar, led by Akali Phoola Singh, opened one of the gates of the city and came forward to parley with Ranjit Singh. As a result, the Bhangi sardars evacuated the fort and the city of the Gurus was spared the ruinous consequences of an armed conflict. A large quantity of war material, stores and provisions fell into the hands of Ranjit Singh, including a famed piece of field artillery described as the "Bhangis' gun". This gun had been made by a gun-wright of Ahmedshah Abdali in 1761. It had changed hands many times and been successively in possession of the Sikhs, Moguls and Pathans. It can be seen today in the Lahore museum.

The conquest of Amritsar was the first important milestone in Ranjit Singh's career. His first act after taking the city was to make obeisance at the Durbar Saheb. He bathed in the holy tank, circumambulated the temple and made a large cash donation. He secured the best marble for the temple and had the most skilled engravers to work on it. He had the whole temple mounted with gold leaf.



*Maharaja Ranjit Singh—A portrait*



A Painting—Maharaja Ranjit Singh on horseback

There are two inscriptions on one of the gates of the temple, which mention these gifts of marble and gold to the temple. Ranjit Singh took no credit for the gifts. He expressed gratitude to Guru Saheb who, in his kindness, enabled Ranjit Singh, his servant, to be of service to him.

Ranjit Singh made no distinction between Hindus and Sikhs among his subjects. When the combined forces of the East India Company and Ranjit Singh defeated Shah Shuja at Kabul, one of the terms inserted by Ranjit Singh in the treaty that followed was that the doors of the Somnath temple, plundered by Mahmud of Ghazni should be returned to India.

In 1804 Ranjit Singh held a large durbar at Amritsar, at which awards were distributed among officers of the army. Quotas were also fixed as to the number of young men each officer would recruit for the army. At this durbar all the states declared that they accepted Ranjit Singh as their sovereign.

In 1799 an emissary of the English company presented himself at the court of Ranjit Singh. His name is said to have been Yusuf Ali Khan. He gave numerous costly presents to Ranjit Singh. His mission was to caution the Maharaja against Shah Zaman, who had at the time been making threatening gestures at the British.

In 1802 Maharani Raj Kaur gave birth to a boy, who was named Kharak Singh. There was much rejoicing at the court. Gifts were distributed and titles conferred. Just then Saheb Singh raised a rebellion at Gujrat. Ranjit Singh despatched a force to curb the rebellion, but Sardarni Sada Kaur intervened and brought about a compromise, and bloodshed was avoided. Then the Raja of Nurpur raised the flag of revolt. Sada Kaur marched with an army to crush the revolt. The rebel forces were joined by Sansar Chand, the Raja of Katoch. When Ranjit Singh heard of this, he personally went with a large army to lend support to Sada Kaur. The Nurpur forces suffered a crushing defeat. The Nurpur fort was handed over to Sada Kaur and Ranjit Singh marched to the opposite bank of the Chenab. Here he conquered the Pindi Bhathian region and appointed Fateh Khan as governor of the place. Then he set out on a pilgrimage to Hardwar. When he returned to Lahore, having made large charities and having annexed numerous big and small

areas along the way, his domains included Dhan Pothehar, Nurpur, Sujanpur, Pathankot, Phagwara, Hoshiarpur, Bijwara and many other areas.

## *Kangra Fort Captured*

THE KANGRA FORT was an important fort at this time and the strongest among all the hill forts. Raja Sansar Chand was the ruler of the fort. In 1809 Gorkha chief Amar Singh attacked Kangra and Sansar Chand approached Ranjit Singh for help, stipulating that if Ranjit Singh would drive out the Gorkhas he would present the Kangara fort to the Maharaja. Ranjit Singh had long had his eyes on the fort and he jumped at the opportunity. Reinforcing his army with the help of Sada Kaur he marched at once by the route of Batala and Jwalamukhi. A fierce battle then ensued between the forces of Ranjit Singh and those of Amar Singh, with thousand killed on both sides. Ranjit Singh won the day and Amar Singh had to lift the siege of the fort. While retreating Amar Singh's forces occupied the fort of Malkada. But Ranjit Singh's forces pursued him there and the Gorkhas were driven out. But then Sansar Chand went back on his word and refused to hand over the fort to Ranjit Singh. This was unwise. For Ranjit Singh was crafty. Before setting out his armies to assist Sansar Chand, he had taken his minor son as hostage.

As soon as Amar Singh left the scene Ranjit Singh's forces laid siege on the Kangra fort. Sada Kaur mounted an elephant, along with the minor son of Sansar Chand and positioned herself at the gate of the fort. The little boy was then made to call out to his father to open the gate to let him in. Sansar Chand fell to the ruse and ordered the gate to be opened. Ranjit Singh's forces at once rushed into the fort and in no time occupied it. Sansar Chand felt humiliated, first because he had gone back on his word and then by having suffered a defeat at the hands of a woman, and took flight. Ranjit Singh appointed Desa Singh Majithia as

governor of the fort. Seeing the writing on the wall, the other Rajas in the neighbourhood fell in line and made submission to Ranjit Singh. Ranjit Singh returned to Lahore and then made for Amritsar to celebrate Diwali.

## *The Secular Raj*

IN 1805, ACCORDING to Malcolm, an English officer, pursued the Maratha chief Jaswantrao Holkar into Punjab. Malcolm travelled extensively in Punjab and wrote a journal.\* He noted that the inhabitants of Punjab were brave and prosperous. Writing to Lord Lake he said:

"The history of the Sikh nation is a history of a righteous war against the Moguls and the Afghans for self-preservation. In it is expressed the temper of a tenacious nation."

Another historian, Gordon described the Sikhs as a "Race of peaceful cultivators, transformed into a fraternity of warriors." On Ranjit Singh's rule Gordon comments that Guru Nanak awakened the people through religious reform; Guru Gobind Singh developed their political consciousness through rigorous discipline; and Ranjit Singh, through mental acuity and physical prowess, made use of the opportunity to establish a monarchy and knit the Sikh nation together.

Ranjit Singh was no doubt born in a Sikh family and his actions bore the hallmark of the chieftainship of a Sikh clan. But was he merely a Sikh monarch? Can his rule be described as Sikh rule? As to these questions there are differences of opinion among historians. He has been judged as a great commander who won innumerable battles and carved out a vast kingdom. He has been called the "Lion of Punjab".

Sikh historians have described him as the founder of Khalsa

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\* Malcolm wrote a number of books on Punjab. The better known are *Sketch of the Sikhs*, *History of India and Memoirs*. He also translated *Bhagat Maal* from Punjabi into English.

Raj, who made the flag of Punjab fly high. According to Fakir Syed Wahiduddin his rule was secular.

While Ranjit strictly followed the tenets of his own faith, he showed the highest respect for other faiths. He visited temples and mosques with as much devotion as he had for the gurdwaras. He not only visited temples and mosques but also offered worship there. He granted Jagirs to many temples and mosques and confirmed the Jagirs granted earlier. He organized *sewa* (voluntary labour) for the renovation of the tomb of Data Gaug Bux at Lahore and made donation for work on the memorial of Hazrat Mian Mir. He donated gold to the temples of Kangra and Jwalamukhi and to the Vishwanath temple at Varanasi. He made donation for the upkeep of the Golden Temple at Amritsar and other historic gurdwaras. Ranjit Singh never accepted the appellation "Sikh kingdom" for his polity, even though he himself was called Sardar or Sikh Saheb Singh or Sarkar-i-Khalsa by people. His rule was always described as Lahore Durbar. According to Syed Wahiduddin:

"Even though the ruler of the state was a Sikh, its administration was in the hands of an able council in which people of all faiths were represented. Even though the basis of Ranjit Singh's rule was religious, in practice it was wholly secular."

Ranjit Singh treated men of all faiths alike. The story is told that once Ranjit Singh, looking out of his window, saw four men carrying a palanquin. At first it struck him that the person riding in the palanquin might be some Pir or Fakir and as he entertained great devotion to Pirs and Fakirs he had enquiries made. He was surprised to learn that what the palanquin-bearers were carrying were only some written papers. He approached the palanquin and asked the young man accompanying it: "Who are you? And what are you carrying in the palanquin?"

"Sir," answered the young man, "I am a poor Muslim scribe. I have spent many years making a copy of the Koran in calligraphy. The palanquin contains the fruit of my efforts."

"Where are you having it conveyed?"

Quite a distance from here there is a Muslim Nawab. I intend to show this to him. If I am lucky, he may appreciate the effort and reward me so that my poverty is alleviated.

Ranjit Singh expressed a desire to see the calligraphy. With great veneration the copy of the Koran was taken out and shown to the Maharaja. Ranjit Singh was very pleased with the effort.

"How much do you expect to be paid for this?" he asked.

"Perhaps two hundred rupees."

"And you think that in this vast kingdom there is no one who can pay you this sum and you have to travel a long distance to get what you want?"

The Maharaja ordered two hundred gold *mohars* to be paid to the boy from the treasury. He then had the palanquin with the Koran placed in the palace.

He then called Fakir Azizuddin and said:

"Fakir Saheb, it is the will of God that I view all religions and their sacred books alike. I view the Koran and the *Puranas* with equal respect. I may not be a Momin, but I am a friend and protector of Momins such as you." He then presented the copy of the Koran to the Fakir.

Ranjit Singh had allocated a sum of fifty lakh rupees every year for endowments to religious institutions.

Syed Wahiduddin says:

"Votaries of all religions considered Ranjit Singh not only a protector of their faith, but also its follower. What greater tribute could there be to the secular character of his rule? He not only had the Golden Temple renovated, but also gifted a golden canopy for the temple of Jwalamukhi and had repairs carried out on mosques."

Hugel, who paid a visit to the temple of Jwalamukhi in 1835, writes:

"The domes of various structures, big and small, are covered with gold and are tastefully made. The gold was donated by Ranjit Singh."

This is also confirmed by Sohanlal in his *Umdat-u-Tawarikh*, p. 263.

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\*It was Ranjit Singh's policy to help all the communities observe their religious practices. There was complete religious harmony during his reign. (*Twarikh-i-Gulshan-i-Punjab* by Pandit Devi Prasad published in 1850).

Pandits, Sheikhs and Maulvis had stipends fixed for their living. According to Syed Wahiduddin the Maharaja and members of his family took part in all religious festivals, whether of the Hindus, Muslims or Sikhs. He joined the festivities of Id-ul-Fitr along with the princes. During the Muharram the prince distributed *niaz* in the manner of devout Muslims. This attitude of Ranjit Singh not only promoted religious tolerance among his subjects but also made him more popular. Is it not significant that whenever the Maharaja set out on a new venture or a new military campaign, or whenever he was indisposed, prayers were offered for his well-being and prosperity in all places of worship.

It is said that Lahore and Kasur the adjacent towns were founded respectively, by Lava and Kusha, the sons of Rama. Being situated close together their relationship has ever been marked by friction. During that time Kasur was being ruled by Nizamuddin Khan and his son Kutubuddin Khan. The forts of Kasur and Multan had long been an eyesore to Ranjit Singh. They were very well fortified and the Maharaja's first sally against the Kasur fort in 1800 had been unsuccessful. Some time later the Maharaja set out with an army for an assault of Multan and despatched another force under Sardar Fateh Singh to Kasur. When Muzaffar Khan, the ruler of Multan, learnt of the advance of Ranjit Singh's army, ravaging the countryside on their way, he mobilized his defence. Ranjit Singh laid siege of the town. The ruler capitulated and paid to Ranjit Singh a sum of seventy thousand rupees as tribute, in addition to numerous costly presents.

In his next campaign in 1808 the Maharaja subdued Jagraon and accepted from Raja Fateh Singh, the ruler of the territory, a tribute of forty thousand rupees. Then followed conquests of Nabha, Patiala, Malerkotla and the fort of Narayangarh, after which Ranjit Singh returned to Lahore. The fort of Narayangarh he made over to his friend Fateh Singh Ahluwalia for a consideration of eight thousand rupees. He then proceeded to annex Mani Majra, Ropar and Ambala. Soon Ludhiana, Jind, Jira, Kotkapura, Sirhind and Faridkot were also added to the kingdom.

## *The Fort at Attock*

BY 1813 THE domains of Ranjit Singh were touching the banks of the Attock river. The fort of Attock was of great importance to Ranjit Singh, but the river presented a natural barrier. The fort at the time was under the rule of Khataks, a Muslim tribe. Subduing the Khataks was no easy task. But Ranjit Singh made up his mind to take the fort. He summoned his commanders Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, Sardar Desa Singh Majithia and Dewan Mohkam Chand and ordered them to proceed to attack Attock.

Fateh Khan Wazir of Kabul sent his brother Dost Mohammed Khan with a large army to defend the town. He also called upon all the Muslim chieftains to mobilize themselves for a *Jehad* (holy war). The two armies were imbued with religious fervour. Each was fighting a holy war. None was prepared to give in. Historians say that vast numbers were killed. When Dost Mohammed Khan was wounded in action the Afghan army was demoralized and fled in his order. The territory of Chhachh fell to Ranjit Singh's forces. Syed Mohammed Latif in his *History of Punjab* has called this battle the first major victory of Ranjit Singh. Although Ranjit Singh already had numerous conquests to his credit, this was the first action in which the Sikhs were called upon to show their mettle. They had to put up a fierce fight for every inch of land. The rocky countryside of Attock became red with blood, and so did the river. The result was that the fort of Attock came into the possession of Ranjit Singh and remained with him for the next forty years.

There was much rejoicing at this victory. The entire town of Lahore was decked in lights. This was the first time the Pathans had suffered a crushing defeat. Pathans, who had been ravaging Punjab through all the preceding years had got their just deserts.

On 16 October, 1800, a British Resident had written to the Governor-General in Calcutta:

"All over India there is admiration for this Sikh (Maharaja Ranjit Singh) who has brought glory to the Sikh nation. It is widely held that were it not for the gallantry, courage and sense of duty shown by Ranjit Singh, Punjab would have been transformed into a desert, for wherever these savages (the Afghans) go, wherever the ground is trodden by their horses' hooves, not a blade of grass ever grows again."

Peshawar has been called the gateway of India. This has been the route taken by all the invaders crossing into India over the past thousands of years. The only exception had been the attack on Peshawar by Jaipal from India. Plundering hordes kept coming into India through Peshawar and carrying away booty and slaves from this country. Indians were subjected to untold cruelties; their women were humiliated and sold into slavery. In the bazaars of Ghazni Indian women were paraded and sold. Babar's foray into India was part of the series.

In 1818 the Lion of Punjab Maharaja Ranjit Singh attacked Peshawar and reversed the course, proving that the people of India could not only stem tides but turn them. Peshawar was at that time governed from Kabul by Yar Mohammed Khan.

To facilitate the movement of the army for the attack on Peshawar a bridge of boats was put across the river Attock and Akali Phula Singh and Sardar Mahtab Singh led the invading force. First the Khataks were overcome at the battles of Khairabad and Jehangira and then the army marched on Peshawar via Nowshehra. Yar Mohammed Khan fled the city.

Following the occupation of the city the Maharaja summoned a meeting to work out measures for the maintenance of peace and order in the area. The Maharaja himself presided at the meeting. Prominent citizens of the town attended it and titles were distributed. Yar Mohammed Khan sent his vakil Dewan Damodardas with costly presents to represent him at the meeting. The presents included horses, a large amount of cash and various other things. The vakil also carried a letter from Yar Mohammed Khan requesting Ranjit Singh to entrust the administration to him and

promising that he would carry out his duties as ruler in the best interests of the Lahore Durbar and also pay a fixed sum every year as tribute.

Ranjit Singh was as willing to take the hand of friendship as he was ruthless in battle. He attached great value to friendship. He acceded to Yar Mohammed Khan's request and the administration of Peshawar was handed over to him in return for a yearly tribute. Yar Mohammed Khan became a vassal of Ranjit Singh.

The conquest of Peshawar was of great strategic importance. It not only brought the north-west frontier into the kingdom, but opened up the lines into Kabul, Kandhar and Ghazni. Later the Maharaja conquered the fort of Jamrod, thus extending his reach to the Khybar pass. Akali Phula Singh and Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa were the commanders in this engagement and their names still echo in the area.

## *Annexation of Multan*

MULTAN IS SHAPED like a milestone and adjoins the western boundary of Punjab. It has had a chequered history. It has been a resting place for armies. The Moguls had divided Punjab in three provinces: Lahore, Sirhind and Multan. At the time of Ranjit Singh's ascendancy Muzaffar Khan was the governor of Multan.

When Ahmed Shah Abdali invaded India in 1752 he occupied Multan and appointed Sujah Khan as its ruler. On Sujah Khan's death Muzaffar Khan became the governor. He was a powerful and crafty ruler. He continuously harassed the Bhangi chieftains in the adjoining areas. Ranjit Singh's occupation of Lahore stung him to the quick and began looking for ways to needle the Maharaja. This put Ranjit Singh on the guard. He made up his mind to end the rule of Muzaffar Khan. Between the years 1801 and 1818 he fought as many as seven actions against Muzaffar Khan. Every time he vanquished the forces of Muzaffar Khan and the latter sued for peace, with tributes and promises of future good conduct. But secretly he persisted in his attempts to find a way to avenge his defeats.

Muzaffar Khan's strength lay in the fort of Multan. It was a very strong fort girt by two walls running parallel with the gap filled with sand. This rendered all artillery attack ineffective. The fort was well provisioned and well stocked with ammunition.

Ranjit Singh set out on his seventh assault on Multan after careful preparations. He was also determined that this time he would not forgive Muzaffar Khan and that Multan would be annexed to the Lahore Kingdom. A force of 25,000 was accordingly despatched under the command of prince Kharak Singh. Misir Dewan Chand, known for his generalship, accompanied the prince.

The force was well supported by cavalry and artillery. Ranjit Singh personally saw to the logistics and supplies and kept a close watch on the campaign through despatch riders.

Muzaffar Khan did his best to incite other Muslim governors, kiladars and nobles to join him in the *Jehad*, but got no response. He also approached the British, but at that time the relations between the British and Ranjit Singh were friendly and Muzaffar Khan was disappointed once again. He was left alone to fight. Ranjit Singh's forces laid siege to the fort thus cutting off the supply lines. Muzaffar Khan's soldiers fought a defensive action for some time, but the resistance was not effective and to save the town from being sacked Muzaffar Khan sent out messages offering a large sum as tribute if Ranjit Singh would call off the action. Ranjit Singh rejected the proposal.

Reinforcements under Akali Phula Singh and Sham Singh Atariwala arrived to augment Ranjit Singh's forces. The commanders trained their heavy guns at the fort and the bombardment caused breaches in the wall, which had so far been considered impenetrable. Muzaffar Khan was killed in this action and Multan was annexed to the Lahore kingdom.

The well-known historian Ghulam Jilani in his book *Jung-e-Multan* relates an incident that reveals the spirit of Ranjit Singh's soldiers. One is told that during the battle the wheel of a gun carriage came off. It was considered necessary that there should be no slackening of the bombardment of the fort. So the unit commander gave a call for volunteers to come forward and put their shoulders to the gun in lieu of the detached wheel. He himself set the example. The gun was fired and the jolt crushed him to pulp. Soon another man came forward, and another and another. In a short time some ten or twelve soldiers had laid down their lives to keep the gun firing. The sustained bombardment at last resulted in a large breach being effected on the wall of the fort and Akali Sadhu Singh with a great shout entered the fort. This was on 15 June, 1818.

## *The Battle of Nowshehra*

PESHAWAR WAS CONQUERED in 1822 and then handed over to Yar Mohammed Khan. In return the Maharaja received many expensive presents and a sum in annual tribute. Though Yar Mohammed Khan continued to be governor, Azam Khan, the ruler of Kabul, did not like the idea of the former becoming a vassal of Ranjit Singh, for he considered Peshawar a part of his domain. He wanted the banks of the river Attock to be the borders of the two kingdoms and he did not at all relish the notion that Ranjit Singh should cross the river. But Ranjit Singh had established his control over Peshawar and he had no intention to let go his hold on the place. Azam Khan therefore set out on a *Jehad*, determined to settle the matter once for all.

When Ranjit Singh got to know of the intentions of Azam Khan, he started deploying his forces for the coming battle. Under the overall command of prince Sher Singh, Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, Fateh Singh Ahluwalia and Phula Singh, who were among his best generals, assembled their forces on the banks of the Attock. The generals decided that the action should be fought beyond Attock, as far away from the territory of Punjab as possible. The forces of Azam Khan had assembled at Nowshehra. When the enemy learnt that Ranjit Singh's army was about to cross Attock, he destroyed the bridge. But by the time this was accomplished Akali Phula Singh had already crossed the river along with his force. It was the rainy season and the river was in flood and the destruction of the bridge made the crossing extremely difficult and hazardous. It was then that Ranjit Singh himself arrived at the head of a large force. He was accompanied by prince Kharak Singh, General Desa Singh and Misir Dewan Chand.

Left with no other alternative Ranjit Singh plunged into Attock with his horse. Inspired by Maharaja his Generals and soldiers jumped into the Attock with their horses and crossed it. In the meantime Akali Phula Singh had landed on the banks of a river near Nowshehra with his army. They offered *ardas* and prepared for the battle. Just then the message was received that Ranjit Singh himself is arriving with artillery. So to be fully effective it was appropriate to fight the battle when the entire army had assembled. But Akali Phula Singh was the leader of Nihang Sikhs.

Once he had offered *ardas* there was nobody to hold him back. He with his army pounced on the enemy.

The battle continued all day and Azam Khan, who had the advantage of numbers, had the upper hand. At dusk, when the fighting ceased, Phula Singh was discovered dead on his elephant. His body was riddled with bullets. The battle of Nowshehra had claimed one of the best generals of Ranjit Singh. The next day his death was avenged by Ranjit Singh, by giving a crushing defeat to the enemy. The body of the dead general was cremated with full state honours. The samadhi of Phula Singh can still be seen near Nowshehra.

## *His Love for Horses*

IT IS OF great importance to a general that his men, his horses and his ammunition should be of best quality. Ranjit Singh often said that however worthless a man, suitable training and constant exercise could shape him into a good soldier. Similarly, however unmanageable a horse might be, it could be controlled through training. He was also of the opinion that a good quality horse should be bought even if the price was high.

He laid great stress on the training of soldiers. It was a time when the principles of fighting were changing. In the earlier days the greatest stress was laid on the physical strength and stamina of a soldier. But towards the close of the eighteenth century combat tactics had been completely transformed in Europe. The British East India Company had established its sway all over India because its armies were properly drilled and were well equipped with small and large guns. Native States, too, had started to reorganize their armed forces. They were now paying greater attention to drill and were enlarging their cavalries and artilleries. According to a historian:

“It did not take Ranjit Singh long to realize that he must modernize his army and introduce new tactics of combat. The English armies, by continuously winning one victory after another, had demonstrated the effectiveness of the changed concepts of warfare, and Ranjit Singh, whose ambition was to establish a large and strong empire, could not ignore his.”

Ranjit Singh set about to reorganise his army on the British and French pattern. he organized the army into brigades after the European fashion. Up to this time soldiers were not paid any salaries. They depended for their living entirely on booty taken in

war. Ranjit Singh for the first time fixed monthly salaries for soldiers. They were also provided uniforms and were assured regular supply of ammunition. Whereas formerly a soldier had to bear the cost of feeding and grooming of his horse, it now became the charge of the state.

Ranjit Singh had a well-trained and disciplined regular army. He also had as reserves the armies of various vassal states. He employed foreign experts for the training of his soldiers. These experts were only concerned with the training of the army. They were never asked to advise on military matters, which Ranjit Singh alone decided. One such foreign expert has written on account of Ranjit Singh's army in his work *Adventures of an Officer in the Punjab in the Service of Ranjit Singh*. He says:

"Except for the headgear and footwear, the soldiers were dressed exactly as British soldiers. In their yellow and green silk shirts..and loosely wrapped turban they presented an impressive appearance. Standing at attention they looked a great deal more formidable than British soldiers."

Maharaja Ranjit Singh paid as much attention to his horses as to his soldiers. If he fancied a horse he would go to any length to acquire it. Emily Eden in her book *Up the Country* says:

"If Ranjit Singh fancied a horse he would rush to grab It. he would forget that he was a Maharaja. He would minutely examine its body and its legs. Riding on the back of a fine horse gave him a joy that exceeded the joy of sitting on the throne. He could ride for hours on end. Frequently he had his meals sitting on the back of a horse with his feet in the stirrups. Horse-riding was part of his daily routine. Every day he emerged from the palace on horse back at 5 a.m. for an hour or two of hard riding. Then he would have his breakfast, many times on horseback."

According to another account the Maharaja heard and decided many cases while on horseback. When he found his kingly duties weighing too heavily on him, he found relief in the company of a horse. Even in sickness the sight of a good horse made him impatient to ride it. Emily Eden says that she found Ranjit Singh

astride a horse more impressive than Ranjit Singh seated on his throne.

Horses prominently figured in his conversations with visiting foreigners. When he met the Governor-General at Ropar he did not omit to show him his horses. Knowing of his love of horses the king of England had sent him pedigree stallion and four mares as a present, which Ranjit Singh kept beautifully caparisoned. According to Burns:

"The saddlery was decorated with diamonds and precious stones and strings of jewels costing many lakhs of rupees adorned the equestrian necks, while ringlets of gold tingled as the horses moved."

The Maharaja's favourite steeds were Safed Pari, Gohar Bar, Laili, Kohinoor and Pari Parwaz. Many legends are current about Laili. Some accounts say that Ranjit Singh had to fight many battles to secure this mount, which took a toll of 12000 men. But Baron Hugal assures us that there is no truth in these tales.

There is another tale current concerning Ranjit Singh's love of horses. Once one of the Maharaja's favourite mounts was found missing from the stable. The Maharaja ordered that the horse should be traced and produced along with the thief. Investigation revealed that Prince Sher Singh had taken the horse from the stable. He was accordingly produced before the Maharaja. Ranjit Singh was furious. The matter being a domestic one, Fakir Azizuddin intervened. Taking the Prince to task he said sarcastically: "You took away the horse as if it was your father's property."

Ranjit Singh laughed: "But of course, Fakir Saheb, it was his father's property."

## *All Will Become Red*

ONCE THE MAHARAJA was shown a map of India in which except for Punjab the entire country was painted red. The red showed the area brought under British control. It made the Maharaja sad to see that one by one the British had swallowed up so many areas. "All will become red!" he sighed. The words were to prove prophetic. He began to ponder on ways and means to free the country from British slavery. It appeared to him that it would be of importance to keep close contact with the native princes and also to establish contacts with foreign powers and seek their help in resisting the British.

The native states of course shifted their loyalties every other day. The Marathas and the Muslims, while seeking the Maharaja's help for their causes, also carried on secret intrigues with the British. According to Dr. Hari Ram Gupta the Maharaja disapproved the belief that India could only produce Sirajuddaulas and Mir Jafars and no great men.

Ranjit Singh tried to establish friendly relations with Iran and Russia. Both these powers were hostile to the British. But he did not have any significant success in this direction.

The British, in their design to establish their supremacy in India had relied more on intrigue and duplicity than on armed might. They were perpetually hatching plans to annex Punjab, the only independent state left in India. Although during Ranjit Singh's lifetime they claimed to be friendly towards him. Their real intentions were however opposite. It has been suggested that even the banquet Miss Eden, the sister of Lord Auckland, arranged for Ranjit Singh on 4 December, 1838, had an ignoble motive. Many

chroniclers say that following the banquet the Maharaja fell seriously ill and he never really recovered from the illness.

*The Civil and Military Review*, Vol. I, No. 10, carries the following noting on a secret file:

"The time is not far off when Ranjit Singh will not be around. There will be then three contestants for the throne: first Khadak Singh, his legitimate offspring, the second Sher Singh, and the third Dhyan Singh, who inclines more towards us. There will be anarchy in Punjab and every chief will act in pursuit of his own interest. The situation will then call for intervention from us. The fort at Ludhiana should be repaired and armed forces should be stationed there. Any attack on Punjab will necessitate crossing the turbulent Satlej river. The fort at Philor, which is a brick structure no better than an inn, cannot withstand pounding even from small-calibre guns. Once we cross the Satlej we shall have no difficulty. The Bias dries up in winter. Gobind Garh will soon be reduced and we can then occupy Lahore and the power of Ranjit Singh can thus be overcome. All the jagirdars will gladly make submission to us."

Ranjit Singh has been described as a "Wily Fox". A letter written by him to the Marwar ruler Maharaja Man Singh is on record. Man Singh was then the most respected ruler in Rajasthan. His patriotism and religiosity had earned him the admiration of all the rulers in the neighbourhood. The British East India Company was at the time busy with its policy of expansion. In 1818 it had already deprived Baji Rao II of his throne and the ruler of Bharatpur was being threatened. Ranjit Singh consulted Maharaja Man Singh on this issue and asked for his help. The letter he wrote makes it abundantly clear that Ranjit Singh ardently desired that the rulers of all the states should unite and throw out the British. The letter runs as follows:

"There has been no news of your welfare for a long time now. I was much grieved to learn that your sole successor is now no more. My sorrow is beyond words. But it is God's will, before which man's efforts are powerless. We can only pray to the Almighty. As regards the news of our kingdom, Multan, Kashmir, Bhakhar and Mankera have already become parts

of my dominions. My armies are now on the march to subdue Kabul and have reached Peshawar. I have in the meanwhile received messages from the Raja of Bharatpur and the Peshwa. They have said that they will both pay one lakh rupees each if the Khalsa army can launch an attack on Delhi. As you well know, mutual enmities between states have brought India to a pitiable plight. There is not the least vestige of goodwill left amongst the states for each other. Apart from you there is no one in India who is dedicated to duty and committed to his word. I am therefore sending you this letter through a messenger. It is my earnest wish that you will provide me with encouragement and inspiration for the defence of India. I shall make every effort to carry out your orders. Kindly send a trusted and intelligent representative to my court. These are many things that cannot be put down in a letter. Kindly also give a hearing to the messenger who will convey some things orally."

(Ranjit Singh)

The letter bears the date 12 Agra Hayana, 1879 Vikrami (25 December, 1822) with the seal of the Maharaja.

In the National Archives of India there are some secret letters from the Maharaja which were intercepted by British spies and withheld. A few of them are in code. Maxton, then Private Secretary to the Governor, Steen, the Company's Resident at the Delhi court and Brook, an official of the Company at Bareilly, reported that the intercepted letters were addressed by the Maharaja to Daulat Rao Scindia, Jaswant Rao Holkar, Raja of Bharatpur, the Peshwa, the Raja of Tikari and the Nawab of Banda. All carried appeals from Ranjit Singh to unite and throw out the British.

About the time when Metcalfe, the British Resident in Punjab, was busy fostering friendly relations with the Maharaja and the southern border of the Khalsa kingdom had been confined to the Sutlej, a messenger of the Maharaja, Ram Singh by name was caught carrying a letter from Ranjit Singh. He gave a signed statement that he was carrying a secret letter from the Maharaja and thus betrayed the cause. It was because of the treachery of this messenger that the Maharaja was forced to sign the treaty of 1809 and his plan to drive out the British was frustrated. Had the plan succeeded,

the history of India would have been different. Malcolm Gordon in his reminiscences had said that "Ranjit Singh needed just one chance to change the map of the world."

The documents relating to the Hyderabad Residency, including those containing the proceedings of the Armstrong Commission, which are in the possession of the National Archives, reveal that the Maharaja had sent his envoys even as far south as Hyderabad and Chittapattam (Madras). Approaches were also made to the Rajas of Rajasthan and the Maratha rulers. Contacts were also established with Russia, Iran and France. A clerk in the Hyderabad service was the first to betray the Maharaja. Then Dhumadas of Fatehjung, (Attock Distt), an agent of Ranjit Singh, was caught by the British and made to reveal the details of the Maharaja's plans.

## *Relations with the British*

WHILE INDIA HAS produced great warriors and patriots, she has also produced traitors like Jai Chand. This was true also of the times when Ranjit Singh ruled. While the Maharaja was busy trying to consolidate his dominions and establish in them an efficient administration, the British were hatching schemes to dismember his kingdom through their policy of divide-and-rule. Punjab had become an eyesore to them. For, as Cunningham has said, "Ranjit Singh ruled over the whole of Punjab and he was totally independent of the British."

The British were anxious to befriend Ranjit Singh, particularly from fear inspired in them by the Napoleonic conquests in Europe, tidings of which were becoming more and more alarming each day. They were afraid that Napoleon might invade India. He had signed a treaty with Russia and he had established his sway over Turkey and Iran.

In pursuit of their policy to befriend Ranjit Singh the British sent C.T. Metcalfe to the Lahore court. He carried many valuable presents from the Governor-General. The Maharaja gracefully accepted the presents and sent presents to the Governor-General in return. But no treaty was negotiated. The British wanted the Maharaja to enter with them into a treaty which would commit him against France and Russia, which were increasing their pressure in the North West Frontier. But Ranjit Singh, the "wily fox" as the British called him, would not commit himself. He told the British that though he considered them his friends, it did not mean that their enemies should also be his enemies. The following year, on April 25, 1809, a treaty was signed with the British in Amritsar. The treaty stipulated that the river Sutlej would be the southern

boundary of Ranjit Singh's kingdom, and that he would be the sovereign of the entire territory to the north of Sutlej, in whose affairs the British would not interfere. Malwa and Sirhind, territories south of Sutlej were thus left in the protection of the British.

In Europe Napoleon was continuing his uninterrupted march of conquests. Russia had been taking more than usual interest in Afghanistan and Iran. The British were concerned. They thought it imperative that there should be strong power between the Khyber Pass and the Sutlej which could act as a buffer when the need arose. They found such a power in the Khalsa Kingdom.

The British may or may not have had admiration for the Maharaja but they were certainly worried by his increasing power and they were keeping a sharp eye on Punjab. According to Gardner.

"Maharaja Ranjit Singh, if given a chance, would have changed the map of the world. He had pieced together the disintegrated bits of Punjab and created an empire. Had the English not become the formidable power they were, he would have annexed even Delhi."

As stated earlier, the power of the English had by then spread all over India. Punjab and Sind were the only exceptions. They were restlessly endeavouring to make Punjab a part of their dominion. They had first extended the hand of friendship to the Maharaja in 1800, barely six months after he had taken Lahore. The British sent a Muslim emissary, Yusuf Ali, to represent them at the Maharaja's court. Yusuf Ali had been briefed to keep a close watch on the Maharaja's plans and to see to it that he did not incline towards Shah Zaman of Afghanistan. But when Shah Zaman was no longer the ruler in Kabul there was no need for Yusuf Ali to continue at the Lahore court and he was recalled. Thus ended the first overture from the British.

The five years that followed were marked by the absence of any kind of relationship between the British and the Maharaja. Then all of a sudden British commander Lord Lake arrived in Punjab. He had been pursuing Maratha chief Jaswantrao Holkar who, after being defeated at Fatehgarh and Deeg, had fled to Punjab. He

thought since he had been fighting for the cause of India's independence, the Khalsa Kingdom would surely give him shelter. According to Hasan, the author of *Anglo-Sikh Relations*, Ranjit Singh watched the situation for some time and then advised Holkar to make peace with the British. He told the British that snatching away the kingdom of Jaswantrao was an unjust act and that they should return to him the conquered areas. Holkar then left Punjab and the British sent word that so long as Holkar did not intrigue with the enemies of the British they would keep their hands off Punjab. Nevertheless the relationship between the Maharaja and the British did not take any concrete shape.

Then another episode followed. While to the North of the Sutlej, Ranjit Singh's writ had been running for long, to the south of the river things were different. But when in 1806 a dispute arose between Patiala and Nabha and Ranjit Singh was invited as an intermediary, these two states also accepted his sovereignty. The following year a quarrel arose between the Rani and the Raja of Patiala and again Ranjit Singh had to intervene. By this time Ranjit Singh's armies had conquered Ludhiana, Sirhind, Jagaraon and many presents and much booty.

Mohkam Chand, the commander of the Maharaja's armies, after conquering numerous hill areas finally reached the south of the Sutlej. These trans-Sutlej states thought that he had done so on the orders of the Maharaja and approached the British Resident at Delhi. Raja Bhag Singh of Jind, Bhai Lal Singh of Kaithal, and the Dewan of Patiala, met the Resident expressing their loyalty to the British and sought their help against the "harassment" by Ranjit Singh. The Resident forwarded their petition to the Governor-General. When this was reported to Ranjit Singh he summoned all the chiefs of the areas concerned to Amritsar. Sir Lepl Griffin in his book *The Rajas of Panjab*, records that at this meeting turbans were exchanged and mutual assurances were given and taken that they would all be friends and the enemy of each would be the enemy of all.

To strengthen their ties with the Maharaja, the British sent C.T. Metcalfe-later Lord Metcalfe-as their envoy to Lahore. He went

with many presents from the East India Company to the Maharaja. He first met the Maharaja on 18 December, 1808.

While this act of friendship was being put on, the Governor-General was giving his decision on the petition of the chiefs of the trans-Sutlej states forwarded to him by the Resident at Delhi. The Governor-General announced that these states would be under British protection. Ranjit Singh took offence at this and refused to abide by the decision. He issued orders to the army commanders to prepare for war against the British. War material and ammunition was got ready and Mohkam Chand was specially summoned from Kangra. In his despatch dated 12 January, 1809, addressed to the Governor-General, Metcalfe wrote :

"Nothing that has happened has persuaded me that the Maharaja will abide by any pact that he may make with us. There is no consistency in his actions.... He can at any time go back upon his word.... should an emissary arrive from France and flatter him, he can easily join the French."

In order to take on the Maharaja the British changed the policy they had so far pursued. This was the result of the secret correspondence between Metcalfe and the Governor-General. So far the British had considered river Jamuna as the border of their dominions. But on 16 January, 1809, British commander Octerlony crossed the Jamuna with a large force and proceeded towards Punjab. After a month's march he reached Ludhiana via Patiala and Nabha. There the British set up a cantonment. They sent Khushwant Rai as their emissary to the Lahore court. Bakshi Nand Singh Bhandari represented Ranjit Singh at Ludhiana. On May 1809 an accord was signed by the Maharaja and the Governor-General according to which the Maharaja would refrain from crossing the Sutlej. As long as Ranjit Singh lived he followed the terms of the treaty. Metcalfe had written to the Governor-General: "As a border the Sutlej would suit us better than the Jamuna. This would enable us to create a breach among the Sikhs and they would thus be deprived of an effective leadership. Delhi would also be safe from Ranjit Singh's growing power and we shall then be sitting on the head of a powerful enemy."

Just at the time when Ranjit Singh's energies were engaged

in encountering the Pathans, the British approached him with a request for permission to send a delegation to explore the possibilities of shipping in the Sindh river. The Maharaja wrote back to say that if the move did not come in the way of the treaty he would have no objection. This showed that the Maharaja had some misgivings as regards the bonafides of the British. While the Maharaja's forces were engaged with the Pathans the British quietly occupied Ferozepur. Ranjit Singh was irritated and he set up a strong fort at Kasur.

In 1830 William IV sent a letter to the Maharaja along with numerous costly presents, in which he extended the hand of friendship. Princep has referred to this in a letter he wrote to the Resident at Delhi on 5 January, 1831. The letter finds a mention in the Punjab Records. Burns, the courier who carried the letter, has given the details of the presents given and received.

When Lord William Bentinck, the Governor-General, visited Simla in 1831 he expressed a wish to see the Maharaja. The Maharaja sent a team to Simla comprising Fakir Azizuddin, Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa, Diwan Moti Ram, Sardar Ajit Singh Sandhwalia and Sardar Dhanna Singh Malwai to prepare the ground for the meeting. Ropar was selected as the venue for the meeting.

The Maharaja and the Governor-General met on 26 October, 1831. There was much warmth and hospitality shown on both sides. Diplomatic ceremonies lasted a whole week. On November 1 the Maharaja left for Lahore, reaching there on 16 November.

The British noticed that Dost Mohammed, the ruler at Kabul, inclined more and more towards Russia and they decided to replace him by Shah Shuja. The British armies had to pass through Punjab on their march to Kabul. Ranjit Singh did not allow them the passage, because their presence in Punjab might have posed a threat to the sovereignty of Punjab. The Maharaja had long been fighting against Dost Mohammed, who was endeavouring to take back Peshawar from the Maharaja who had conquered it.

The Maharaja now had two alternatives: either to support the British or to start an armed conflict against them, thus dividing his forces to fight on two fronts. The Maharaja decided to support the British. The move has been praised by the historian Abdul Kadir and by Gurmukh Nihal Singh in his *A Note on the Policy of*

*Maharaja Ranjit Singh Towards the British.* It is clear that the Maharaja had full realization of the immense power of the British. Yet it would be a mistake to imagine that the Maharaja put his signature on the treaty with the British from any fear. He of course had to strengthen the defences within the kingdom. Ranjit Singh was a brave man and he remained faithful to his pact with the British all his life. In 1827 Lord Emlhurst paid a visit to Simla and the Maharaja sent a deputation to call on him. Then again in 1828 he sent a deputation to meet the commander-in-chief of the British forces. Towards the end of his reign the Maharaja had come to realize that the intentions of the British were not noble.

On 13 August, 1838 the Maharaja met Lord Auckland in Ferozepur. Lord Auckland sent a report of the meeting to the committee that kept a secret watch on the internal affairs of states. The report also contains a reference to the agreement entered into between the British, the Maharaja and Shah Shuja of Kabul. The report also recommends measures through which the British could advance their interest in Punjab. B.J. Hasrat in his historical work has the following to say on this:

"Ever since Russia started increasing its pressure in the North-West areas the British had been willing for direct talks with Kabul. When their talks with Dost Mohammed did not bear fruit, they had him deposed and put Shah Shuja on the throne at Kabul. This showed that they did not treat Punjab as a sovereign state but as a vassal state. Now if the British continue their relationship with Kabul, the Maharaja will not like it. The British will not care. They will in fact support the claim of Kabul on Peshawar against Ranjit Singh."

Ranjit Singh had come to understand by then that Punjab was the last obstacle in the British plan to annex the entire country. Punjab had become an eyesore of the British. A comment by an English army officer, Major Smith, following the first British-Sikh battle exposes the designs of the British in Punjab.

"We have forcibly taken over the area between Ferozepur and Punjab.... I ask, by doing so have we not gone back on our first promise of the friendship treaty."

The British policy towards Punjab was not based on the annals

of truth. They had only made a show of friendship in order to find a foothold in Punjab. Most Englishmen who made visits to Punjab in those days were intelligence agents. They regularly kept the English authorities posted with the developments in Punjab. Smith wrote:

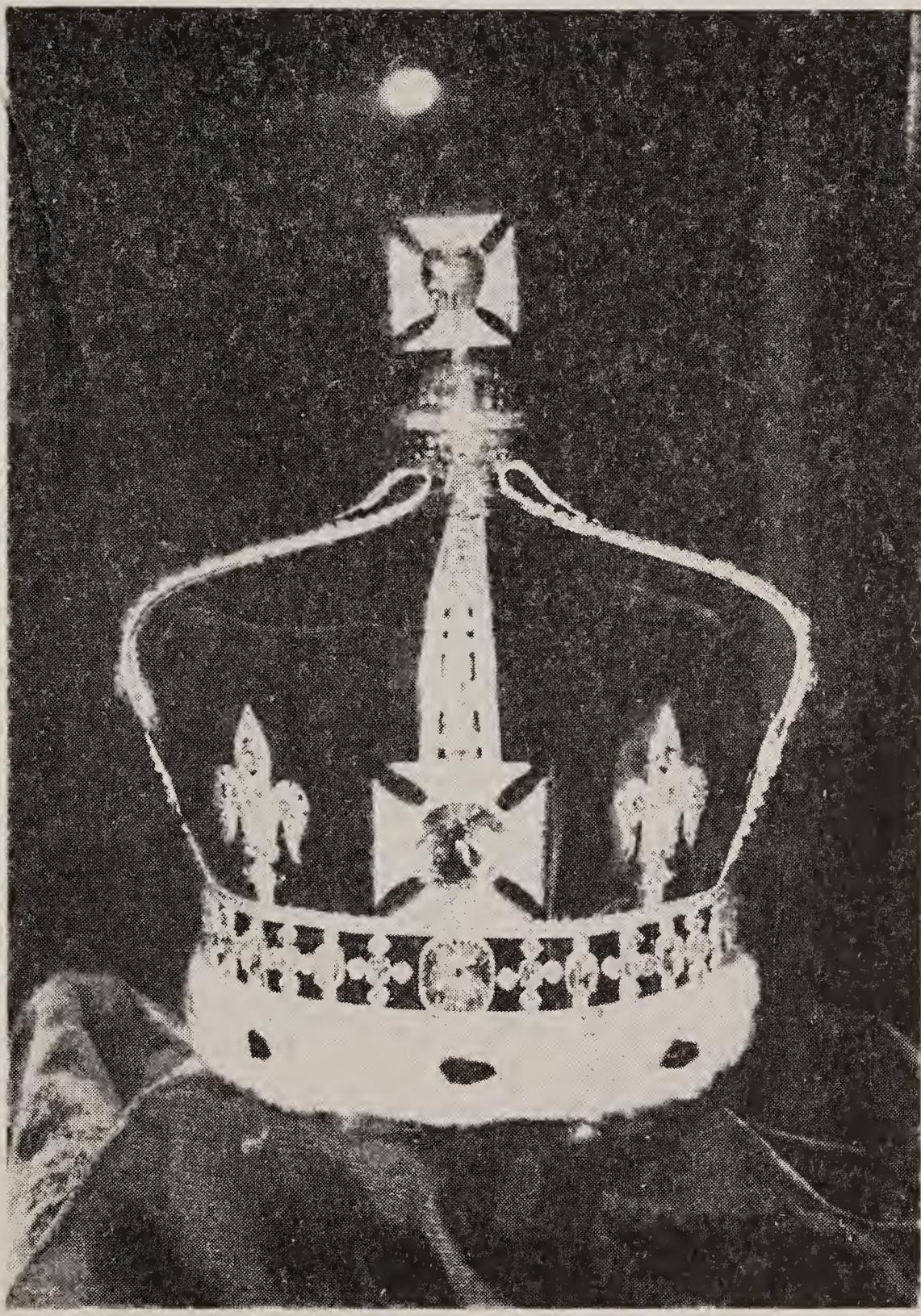
"We knew that the Sikhs were a brave people and excellent warriors and we tried to wean them away from the Khalsa army. We were not very successful. No more than six Sikhs joined us."

Nevertheless the British succeeded in luring away a few Sikhs to act as spies. They received directions from one Broadfoot, who had his offices in Ludhiana. Local Sikhs and Europeans supplied him intelligence. The Dogra chiefs also had an English officer Capt. Gardener in their employ. He also gave secret information to the British. The regrettable part of it all was that Sikhs too were part of this traitorous activity.

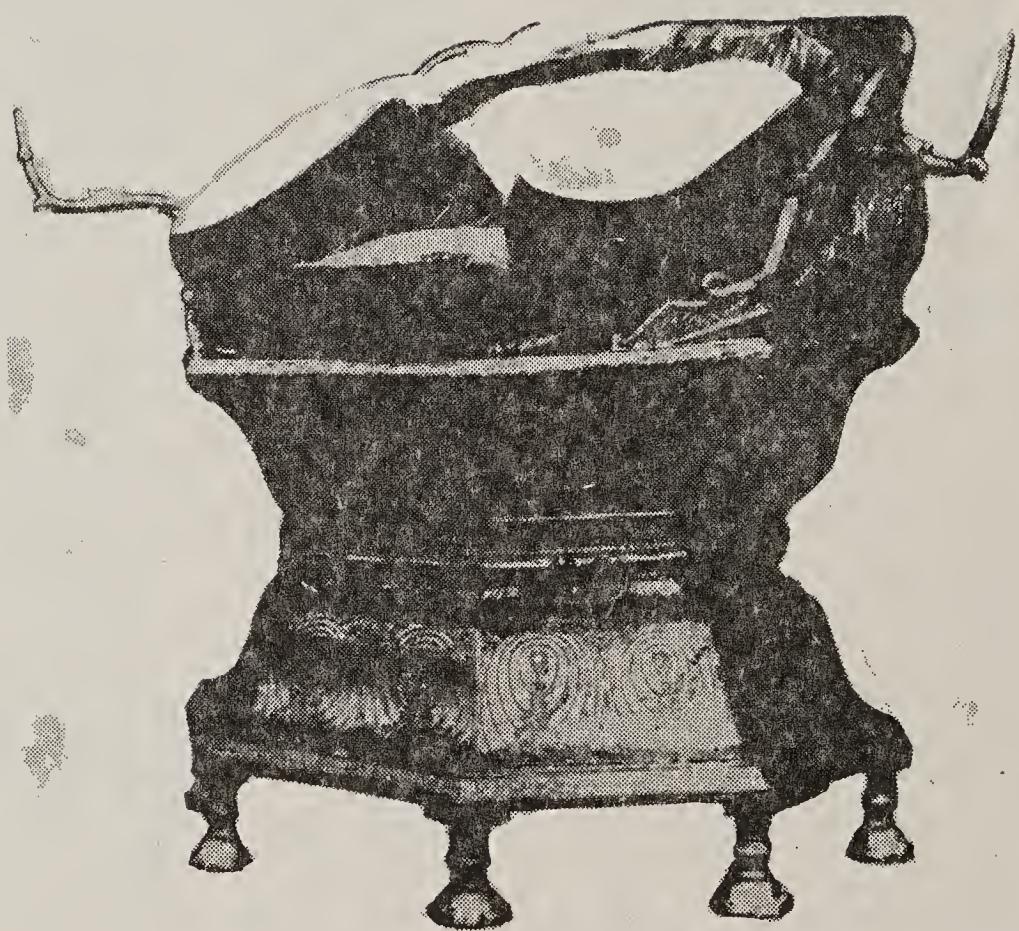
## *Conquest of Kashmir*

THEIR FORAY IN Peshawar had boosted the morale of Ranjit Singh's forces. There were then three Muslim states which considered themselves under the suzerainty of Kabul and were much closer to Kabul than to Punjab. These were Peshawar, Multan and Kashmir. Ranjit Singh had already subdued Peshawar and Multan. Now it was the turn of Kashmir. As soon as the armies were back from Peshawar, Ranjit Singh ordered them to march into Kashmir. The armies were asked to assemble at Wazirabad, where they were then organized in three detachments. The first detachment was commanded by Sham Singh Atariwala and General Dewan Chand, the second by Prince Kharak Singh and Akali Phoola Singh while the third by Ranjit Singh himself. The first two detachments made for Punch by way of Bhimbar and Rajouri. At Rajouri, the ruler Asghar Khan put up some resistance, which was easily put down. At Punch Zabardast Khan put up a severe resistance. A fierce battle ensued, in which the issue was in Ranjit Singh's favour. The armies then proceeded to Srinagar. There again the confrontation with Jabbar Khan Pathan's forces was a grim one. But Ranjit Singh again had the upper hand. Jabbar Khan Pathan fled to Afghanistan and thus Kashmir was joined to the Khalsa kingdom. The year was 1819.

Dewan Moti Ram, who was the son of Dewan Mohkam Chand was made the governor of Kashmir. The following year, in 1820, Kashmir was placed under the administration of Hari Singh Nalwa.



*Crown with Kohinoor. From a facsimile, Maharaja Ranjit Singh,  
Museum, Amritsar*



*Golden Chair of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839)*

## *Hari Singh Nalwa*

HARI SINGH NALWA occupied an important place among the generals of Ranjit Singh. From a humble soldier he rose to the rank of general by dint of his courage, fighting qualities and devotion to duty. He took over from Dewan Mohkam Chand the overall command of Ranjit Singh's army. He retained the position till his death. He was killed in a battle at Jamrod in 1837. What better death could a soldier aspire for ?

Hari Singh Nalwa was born in 1791 and was thus younger to Ranjit Singh by 11 years. His father S. Gurdial Singh was from Gujranwala. His father died when he was only seven. He was brought up by his maternal grandfather. He got a very good education. While still a child he had acquired considerable skill at riding and shooting. Ranjit Singh First noticed him in 1805 at the Basant Panchami fair at Shalimar Bagh. From then on he came closer and closer to Ranjit Singh. He was first employed as a bodyguard to Ranjit Singh. He had a passion for hunting and used only a sword to hunt lions. Once when he was out hunting in the company of the Maharaja, a lion attacked him. He thrust his arm into the jaws of the beast, caught hold of his tongue and threw him to the ground. Before the Maharaja could come to his rescue he had finished the lion. Seeing this feat the Maharaja said: "You are brave as King Nala." The name stuck and from then on he was called Nalwa.

On returning to Lahore the Maharaja heaped honours on him. He was promoted to the rank of a Sardar and a detachment of the army described as Sher Dil was entrusted to his command. The detachment consisted of 800 soldiers on foot and cavalry. His first victory was at the battle of Kasur, which greatly impressed all the other commanders. The Maharaja was so pleased with him that

he granted him a jagir of thirty thousand rupees. At the siege of Multan it was Hari Singh Nalwa who had finally managed to breach the defences of the fort. He used gunpowder to blast the wall of the fort, in which he himself was wounded. It was largely thanks to his courage that Multan was conquered.

From then on Hari Singh Nalwa took part in every important battle. He fought shoulder to shoulder with Ranjit Singh in about a hundred battles. The stories of his valour reached as far as Kabul, Kandhar and Khyber.

He was the governor of Kashmir from 1820 to 1822. The Maharaja was so happy with his administration that he permitted him to issue coins in gold. From 1822 to 1830 he was the governor of Hazara. From 1835 to 1837 he was the governor of Peshawar. It was in 1837 in the battle of Jamrod that he was killed. He was cremated in the fort of Jamrod and there is a memorial to him at the place. Later his widow built for him another memorial at Gujranwala.

## *Administration*

PUNJAB UNDER RANJIT Singh was divided into four administrative areas: Multan, Kashmir, Lahore and Peshawar. Each province was further divided into districts called Parganas. A Tehsil was called Taluka. There were a few districts that did not form part of any province. These districts were larger than parganas but smaller than provinces. During the Mogul times there were provinces but no parganas. According to Fauja Singh, Ranjit Singh felt the need to create parganas because in 1818 his entire kingdom was no larger than the Lahore province of the Moguls. For effective administration he brought into being a new administrative structure. He created a new administrative unit that was larger than a pargana but smaller than a province. This was called Ilaka. A pargana was divided into zillas, zillas into talukas. The smallest unit was the village.

The ruler of a province or a pargana was the Nazim. He had under him Kardars and Talukdars. All Nazims obviously did not enjoy the same authority. They had greater or lesser authority according to whether they ruled larger or smaller areas. Lahore had no Nazim. That province was governed by the Maharaja himself.

Ranjit Singh had inherited only the Shukarchakia *Misl* from his ancestors. The area of this *misl* comprised Gujranwala and the surrounding territory. Ranjit Singh gradually increased this through his conquests to form his large kingdom. Gradually as his conquests brought into his kingdom larger and larger areas, his administrative system too underwent changes.

In the early half of the nineteenth century means of transport were severely limited. There were only horses, bullockcarts or *dolis*. This reflected in the influence and authority that the centre could

exercise on provinces with extensive and far-flung territories.

According to A.N. Sinha, Ranjit Singh in his own person formed the axis of the administration. But this should not be taken in a narrow way. In the Mogul times and even earlier a king or an emperor was considered as representing God on earth. But Ranjit Singh had risen from among the people. He had many ministers to help him in the administration of the kingdom, though the final authority rested only in him. Raja Dhyan Singh Dogra was the prime minister. All the departments came under his jurisdiction. Raja Gulab Singh and Raja Suchet Singh, Dhyan Singh's two brothers, also commanded great influence at the court. When the Maharaja was away from the capital the prime minister assumed all powers of administration and took all decisions. The Maharaja had complete trust in his prime minister, who was never changed during his reign. Dhyan Singh had more authority and influence than all the other ministers and sardars put together. His personality too was most attractive.

The next in importance was Fakir Azizuddin, who was the Maharaja's foreign minister. He was also a physician. His ability gained him much popularity. Because he was highly educated, all secret documents of the Lahore court passed through his hands. The Maharaja had complete confidence in his political sagacity. He was held in great esteem by the Maharaja and he remained the kingdom's foreign minister throughout the reign of Ranjit Singh. English historians have given him unstinted praise. Ranjit Singh had at one time been so angered by the British that he was on the point of going to war against them. It was because of his statesmanship that a conflict between the British and the Lahore court was avoided. Robinson, Moorcroft, Cunningham have all agreed that it was Azizuddin's intervention that saved the situation.

As Finance Minister Ranjit Singh first had Dewan Bhawani Das and then Dewan Dinanath. The Home Minister had charge of the police. He was entrusted with the maintenance of law and order of the city and for managing the affairs inside the Maharaja's palace. It was he who decided who should meet the Maharaja and when. He saw to the security of the Maharaja and arranged for mounts. Before he became prime minister Dhyan Singh held the charge as Home Minister.

Each province, as mentioned earlier, was governed by a Nazim. The Nazims of Kashmir and Peshawar enjoyed greater authority than the Nazims of other provinces. Sardar Hari Singh Nalwa and Moti Ram, who were in turn the Nazims of Kashmir were paid one lakh rupees annually. Avitable who was the Nazim of Peshawar, received 41,000/- rupees annually. Lala Sawan Mal, the Nazim of Multan received 36,000/- rupees. In the central areas administered by the Maharaja himself each pargana had a Nazim of its own. The Maharaja knew each of his officers and called them by their names. He frequently went out on tours to keep himself posted with the situation. This kept the officials all the time on their toes.

The Nazims of the provinces which were distant from the centre had greater authority. In many matters they could take their own decisions. The Maharaja's intelligence agents kept him informed of the affairs in the provinces. From time to time inspection teams were also sent to the provinces which gave detailed reports to the Maharaja. The Nazims were also required to send monthly reports to the centre. The Maharaja thus kept a close watch on the provinces. Those showing outstanding performance were rewarded with promotion while those found derelict in their duty were summarily punished.

On 10 March, 1839 the *Punjab Akhbar* published criteria for the appointment of senior administrators and spelled out their duties which were as follows:

1. To conquer new territories and thus expand the frontiers of the kingdom;
2. To take steps to secure the defences of the kingdom;
3. To maintain law and order;
4. To strengthen the judiciary and the penal structure;
5. To fix and collect taxes.

Welfare activities too were an essential part of the administration. The judicial wing was represented by the local panchayats and prominent citizens. Collection of revenue was the charge of the Mukaddam, the Kanungo, the Panch and the Chaudhary. The collection procedure was as follows: officials went to the fields just before harvesting and measurements of the fields were entered into records. The revenue was then fixed in consultation with the Panch

and Chaudharies. The actual levying was done after the farmers had harvested crop and sold it. If a peasant sought a period of grace this was granted. When drought or famine conditions prevailed cultivators were often granted revenue exemption. The Maharaja disapproved of severity in the collection of revenue. If the cultivators appealed against a levy the officials were ordered to reassess it.

Although Ranjit Singh's Kingdom was a monarchy, he ran it in a democratic manner. Col. Malcolm has noted that the Maharaja's administration suited the genius of the local population. The Pakistani historian Wahiduddin has commented: "Though Ranjit Singh was himself a Sikh, his chief administrators were people of many religions. He himself was a religious person but his rule was secular." Chopra in his work *Punjab as a Sovereign State* says: "Ranjit Singh was endowed with a high degree of learning. He holds an eminent place among the rulers of India. Indeed it would not be wrong to say that he was born to rule. He was steeped in qualities of leadership. One often gathered the impression that people only waited in readiness to carry out any commands he might issue."

Burnes, a foreign traveller in his book *Travels to Bokhara* says: "No other Indian ever impressed me as much as this man. It is a matter of perpetual wonder that though uneducated he runs, his administration with such skill without any guidance."

## *The End*

ON THAT DARK night on 27 June, 1839 Ranjit Singh lay on his sick-bed in the Samman Burj of the Lahore fort. He could speak with difficulty. He moved his lips and rolled his one eye to look at things around him. He was nearing his death, while his generals, with whom he had won such magnificent victories, watched helplessly. There were tears in the eyes of them all. They had all been ordinary men, and had been raised to nobility and riches by Ranjit Singh. Once anyone caught Ranjit Singh's eye he rose in stature. Now the Maharaja was alone, struggling against death. His generals could not provide him any help. Hakim sat by his bedside, deeply worried.

Ranjit Singh made a sign that he should be seated in a chair. This was immediately done. Honigberger in his book *Thirty Five Years in the East* has thus described the scene;

"The Maharaja was seated in chair. He was paralysed and could not move. He had lost the power of speech. He could only communicate his wishes through gestures of his hands. He had no other way, because he was illiterate."

The Maharaja breathed his last in the Samman Burj. Exactly forty years earlier he had ridden into the fort. It had been the 15th day of Ashadha 1856 *Vikrami*. Now, on the 15th day of Ashadha 1896 *Vikrami*. He said goodbye to the world.

No kitchen fires were lit in Lahore on that day. The entire kingdom was grief-stricken.

A large pyre of sandalwood was got ready in Huzuri Bagh and Ranjit was carried to it. The entire city of Lahore had gathered for the Maharaja's last *darshan*. The soldiers reversed arms. In the funeral procession the chief generals of the Maharaja walked with saddened hearts. The procession also included the Maharaja's four

consorts and seven concubines. The custom then decreed that all issueless widows must perform *suttee* with their dead husbands. Capt. Orlich, a German traveller, in his book *Travels in India including Sindh and the Punjab* thus described the scene:

"The queens stripped themselves of all their finery which they distributed among their friends, relatives and serving maids. Before mounting the pyre they inspected their faces in the mirror to reassure themselves that the thought of death had not frightened them. Then with a far away look in their eyes they walked towards the pyre. There they first prostrated themselves before the dead body of the Maharaja and then jumped onto the pyre. A sheet of dry leaves and grass was soon spread over them and they were drenched in quantities of oil and ghee. Then the pyre was lit. In no time the raging flames were touching the sky. Just then Raja Dhyan Singh arrived there with his wives. Unable to bear the parting from his master he made an attempt to jump into the pyre but was forced back by Sher Singh."

Raja Dhyan Singh was saved, but the pet pair of pigeons which the Maharaja fed with his own hands, flew in and fell into the pyre.

A wave of shock and grief swept Punjab. There was mourning in every home. Ranjit Singh had been very popular as a ruler. Everyone felt as though he or she had lost a kin. No ruler ever could lay claim to the love and admiration that the people of Punjab showered on Ranjit Singh. The reason simply was that the Maharaja loved his people as his own children. Capt. Fane, in his diary *Five Years in India*, says:

"The image of Ranjit Singh was that of a kind and humane ruler. His personality was such that he had made a place in the heart of everyone. He was a well-meaning person. He never awarded death penalty to anyone, however dastardly the crime. The strange thing was that though he did not award capital punishment, criminal elements went in terror of him."

Khushwant Singh in his book *Ranjit Singh Maharaja of the Punjab*, goes so far as to say that in the history of the entire world it would be difficult to find a ruler who never took a life and yet carved such a magnificent kingdom.

A letter addressed to Maj. Henry Lawrence which the Maharaja dictated on 5 May, 1830 to Fakir Azizuddin, brings out the secret of his success and popularity. Maj. Lawrence had taken over command of a regiment on that day. Imploring the officer to be devoted to his duty, the Maharaja gave him a brief outline of his administrative purposes and told him to hold public good supreme. He said:

"My kingdom is a great achievement. It began as a small state and now is a large empire. It had been divided by many borders. Now it is a well organised and integrated polity. It is my wish that it should prosper and the future generations may see it as a united dominion."

This wish of Ranjit Singh was not fulfilled. He himself was an able ruler but none of his successors showed that kind of ability. Major Lawrence in his diary commented that the letter Ranjit Singh had written to him was an important document and the advice he had given was wholesome. Lawrence took particular note of the following observations in the letter:

"I have always been favoured by luck and sincerity of purpose. Although I won my conquests through force of arms, the administration of the conquered territories was always marked by generosity and discipline. I honoured the brave and encouraged talent wherever I saw it. In the field of battle too I gave due respect to valour. In any situation of crisis I steadfastly remained with my forces. I faced difficulties with them. In the battlefield and in court I eschewed favouritism. I never cared for my own comforts. Since the day I took over the duties of the sovereign I have never slackened vigilance. I served saints and men of God. I forgave even those who defied me. That may be why God was kind to me and I prospered in my purposes. The borders of my kingdom now touch China on one side and Afghanistan on the other. All the fertile lands beyond Multan and the Sutlej are controlled by me. Is it not a matter of honour to have the opportunity to serve such a glorious kingdom?"

Lawrence noted: "This is not a letter, but a mirror showing the personality of the Maharaja. The Maharaja has outlined his character in this, and this has made the document of historic value."

In his work *Memories of the Reign of Ranjit Singh*, written twenty years after the death of the Maharaja, Dewan Dina Nath has thrown light on the character of the Maharaja. He writes:

"Maharaja Ranjit Singh has now been lying in his Samadhi for nineteen years. None of his offsprings are any more on the scene. One of his sons, for reasons of faith and education, has distanced himself from his father's heritage. The lamp of the Khalsa Raj, after spreading light for a brief period has now gone out forever. And yet from one end of Punjab to the other, from the chiefs of states to humble farmers, everyone remebrs the sarkar with respect and honour."

If we leave out the religious leaders, Ranjit Singh may be considered the greatest Indian of the nineteenth century. He raised an oppressed people on its feet and breathed self-confidence into it. He was the first Indian after Chandragupta Maurya who was successful in turning the course of history. He drove the invaders back into the mountain ranges and caves whence they had issued from time to time to invade India. He was not only a great warrior but also a wise and discriminating ruler.

Even though most of India had by then come under the control of the British, Ranjit Singh was, according to Zafar Beg, the true ruler of the country. His passing away left a void in Punjab that was never filled. "It is difficult," writes Capt. Osborne, "to measure the immensity of the grief felt by the people on Ranjit Singh's death." Capt. Osborne was present at the last hour of the Maharaja and witnessed the whole tragic scene.

Shah Mohammed has narrated the events of the Anglo-sikh wars in his Punjabi verse. About Ranjit Singh he says:

The great warrior Ranjit Singh was born,  
And with his might shook the country,  
Conquering Multan, Kashmir, Peshawar,  
Chamba, Jammu, Kangra and Kot Babar  
Snatched Ladakh from China,  
And struck coins in his own name,  
Mohammed Shah knows that,  
He ruled well for fifty years.

## *The Kohinoor*

THE WORLD-FAMOUS diamond Kohinoor, which means the mountain of light, had been set in the bracelet worn by Ranjit Singh. Ranjit Singh wore the bracelet only on ceremonial occasions. The Kohinoor has had a chequered history. No one knows through how many hands it has passed or how many kingdoms were destroyed on account of it. People have associated it with Karna of the *Mahabharat*, though there is no historical proof for the belief.

Babar won the battle at Panipat in 1526. He then despatched prince Humayun on an invasion of Agra. Humayun conquered Agra without a battle. When his forces were entering the fort, a curious incident took place. An old woman, said to be the mother of Ibrahim Lodi, approached Humayun and sought protection from him. In exchange she gave him something wrapped in rags. This something was the Kohinoor. Humayun gave it to his father. Babar has mentioned the incident in his book *Tuzke-e-Baburi*. Babar wrote: "Of the jewels that came into our possession at Agra this is the most valuable. It is 320 *rattis* in weight." He congratulated Humayun on the acquisition of such a large diamond and presented it to him. Till 1540 it remained in the Mogul chests. When, upon being defeated by Sher Shah, Humayun fled to Kabul, he was carrying the diamond on his person. Then when in 1555 Humayun re-established his authority in India he brought it back with him. It remained with the Moguls for the next 200 years. In 1739 Nadir Shah crushed the Mogul emperor Mohammed Shah and took away with him to Iran not only the Peacock Throne but also the Kohinoor. When, Nadir Shah first saw the diamond its dazzle stunned him. It was he who named it Kohinoor. Afterwards the diamond came into the possession of Ahmedshah Durrani and later when Shah

Shuja fled from Afghanistan with his Begum he brought it with him to India. Here he was put in prison by Jahadad Khan, the ruler of Attock. Having been kept for some time in the fort of Attock, he was later transferred as a prisoner to Kashmir. In Kashmir Ata Mohammed had him chained and thrown into a cellar. Wafa Begum, Shah Shuja's wife, went to Lahore to plead with Ranjit Singh for help. She promised that if Ranjit Singh could have her husband freed from prison, she would present him the diamond. The Maharaja had Shah Shuja freed from prison and thus Kohinoor came into the possession of the Lahore court.

N.C. Sen, in his *History of Kohinoor*, says that the Maharaja gave to Shah Shuja a cash present of 50,000 rupees and 50,000 rupees annual worth of jagir. He also assured him help of the Khalsa army whenever he should need it. This is also confirmed by Mohammed Latif in his book *History of the Punjab*.

Following the death of Ranjit Singh the British took over control of the Punjab. Till 1850 the diamond remained with the Punjab administration. On 6 April, 1850 Governor-General Lord Dalhousie had Col. Ramsay carried it to England to be presented to the queen. The diamond has been cut and set in the Royal crown.

## *Hero of Popular Legends*

THERE ARE NUMEROUS legends current featuring Ranjit Singh. Each legend touches upon one or another of his personal qualities.

### *Philosophers' Stone*

One day, as the Maharaja proceeded through the streets of Lahore in a royal procession, an old woman approached him. She carried an iron griddle, with which she touched the Maharaja and soiled his clothes with the soot. The guards immediately seized her. Asked to explain her behaviour, she said, "Sire, I am a poor woman. My daughters are of marriageable age. I was told that you were like a philosophers' stone whose touch turned iron into gold. I had only this iron griddle. So I brought it along to have it turned into gold." The Maharaja ordered gold equal in weight to the griddle to be given to the old woman. The old woman was very happy.

### *Helping Hand*

In 1833 Kashmir was afflicted with a serious epidemic and people in thousands left Kashmir for Punjab. The Maharaja started free kitchens in every town and kept a close watch to see that people were properly fed. He went out on inspection tours unescorted. Once while on such a tour he came upon an old woman trying to lift a bag of grain onto her head. The Maharaja at once went to her help and carried the grain to the old woman's dwelling. The old woman was touched and blessed the Maharaja: "May you prosper, my son, and may you become the king of Lahore."

*Exemplary Magnanimity*

Once during a royal procession a stone was hurled at Ranjit Singh. There was confusion. A boy was immediately caught. An officer ordered, "cut off his head." Ranjit Singh said: "Wait," He proceeded to question the boy;

"Little boy, did you hurl the stone at me ?"  
 "No, sire, I did not hurl the stone at you."  
 "Well, then, how did the stone hit me ?"  
 "Sire, we were throwing stone at the berry tree to get berries."

Ranjit Singh ordered that the boy and the others with him be given sweets. Said he: "If a berry tree gives fruit when hit by a stone, why should I be less generous ?"

*Clown's Last Bid*

Once a clown, who prided himself on his wit, was arrested for some offence. On the day he was to be produced before the Maharaja, Ranjit Singh was not in a cheery mood. An official told the clown, "If you make the Maharaja laugh, you will be forgiven." The clown tried many antics to accomplish this purpose, but failed to cheer up the Maharaja. He was scared and said: "Now of course I shall be punished. But how laborious it is going to be for you-calling a munshi and dictating the order, wasting ink and paper. Would it not be simpler to laugh and thus save all the bother?" This made the Maharaja laugh and the clown was forgiven.

*The Buyer has Vanished*

Once while the Maharaja went riding on an elephant, a man tipsy from drink approached him and asked: "Hey you, one-eyed fellow, want to sell this buffalo calf?"

He was immediately seized and produced before the Maharaja the following day. The Maharaja addressed him:

"Now, then, fellow, want to buy the buffalo calf?"

"Sire," said the man, "The buyer has now vanished." He was referring to his state of drunkenness.

The Maharaja laughed and the man was set free.

### *Repartee with Moran*

The Maharaja was extremely fond of Moran, a dancer of Amritsar. Occasionally she was called to Lahore to entertain the Maharaja. She was quite intimate with the Maharaja and was allowed much personal liberty with him. She once remarked to the Maharaja: "Where were you when they were distributing looks?" The Maharaja said: "I was at the time busy praying to be made ruler of a mighty kingdom. My prayers were answered."

### *Exchange with the Painter*

Once a foreign painter approached the Maharaja and requested permission to paint his portrait. The Maharaja said: "But my face has no qualities that would inspire you to paint my likeness." But the painter persisted and the Maharaja promised that he would pay him a visit at his camp. The next morning the painter was ready with his palette, brushes and pigments. The Maharaja did not reach. Instead he sent a camel. This made the painter laugh. "So," he said, "the Maharaja has compared his figure with that of a camel."

## *Fairs and Festivals During Ranjit Singh's Reign*

EVERY COMMUNITY HAS its own fairs and festivals. During Ranjit Singh's reign all fairs and festivals had assumed a National colour. Ranjit Singh participated in all these fairs and festivals along with members of his family and shared in the rejoicing of his Hindu, Muslim and Sikh subjects. The following are some of the important festivals mentioned by the chroniclers of Ranjit Singh's reign.

### *Lohri*

This is a winter festival and is celebrated at nightfall. Families and groups of people sit around a camp-fire and make merry. The Maharaja participated in this festival with much enthusiasm. The court was decorated and titles and rewards were distributed.

### *Maghi*

This is the day of Magha Sankranti following the night of Lohri. The historian Shahmat Ali in his book *The Sikhs and the Afghans* says that on the day of Maghi, Ranjit Singh conferred titles on notables.

### *Basant*

There is a tomb of Sufi fakir Madholal Hussain in the Shalimar Bagh. It is here that the spring festival was held every year. Everyone, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh participated in the fair without any communal distinction. Young women in large numbers danced and sang. In 1825 on the occasion of the spring festival the Maharaja

had offered a sum of Rs. 2000 for *prasad*. He donned a yellow apparel and visited the tomb of Fakir Madholal Hussain. According to Baron Hugel the Maharaja made a present of 125 rupees and went and sat under the canopy. The canopy had been studded with diamonds and other precious stones. Then Guru Granth Saheb was read. Gurbani was recited. The Granth Saheb was wrapped in ten pieces of cloth, the uppermost one being yellow.

### *Holi*

Holi was celebrated by both Hindus and Sikhs. The Holi fire was lit, coloured powder was applied by people to one another and crowds of men, women and children sang and danced through the streets. Many European women too participated in the fun and frolic. The Maharaja too took part in the festivity with enthusiasm.

Henry Fane, the commander-in-chief of the English forces happened to be in Lahore on 22 March, 1837, which was a day of Holi. He wrote: "Every chair had a basket attached to it which contained coloured powder. Nearby stood a large pail filled with saffron coloured water." The Maharaja himself applied coloured powder on the bald head of Henry Fane. An elderly man threw coloured water on the British officer's clothes. A diplomat who had arrived from Kandhar had his beard all dyed in saffron and yellow. In the afternoon, the Maharaja proceeded to the parade ground for the festivity. In the evening he went through the streets of the city in a procession of elephants. The Maharaja spent one lakh rupees every year on the occasion of Holi.

### *Hola Mohalla*

This festival had begun during the time of Guru Gobind Singh at Anandpur Saheb. The festivity was marked by armed Nihangs on horseback clad in armour holding jousts against each other. Equestrian contests too were held. The Maharaja sent regular yearly grants for this festival.

### *Lunar and Solar Eclipses*

It was customary to give money in charities following each solar

or lunar eclipse. On 12 April, 1828 on the occasion of a solar eclipse the Maharaja gave 12000 rupees in charities.

### *Janmashtam*

Krishna Janmashtami too was celebrated with great enthusiasm in the kingdom. Guns were fired on the occasion.

### *Baisakhi*

Baisakhi was celebrated with much gusto in the kingdom. Charities were given to temples, mosques and gurudwaras. In 1828 on the Baisakhi day the Maharaja conferred the title of Raja-e-Rajan on Raja Dhyan Singh. Dhyan Singh and his brothers, being Dogras were addressed as Mian by the people. The Maharaja ordered that anyone calling them Mian would be punished.

The Maharaja used to visit Amritsar on Baisakhi day. In 1831 the Maharaja gave utensils and cloths of the value of 2500 rupees to Harmandar Saheb. The original copy of the Granth Saheb was especially brought from Kartarpur Saheb for the occasion. The Maharaja listened to the Gurbani with much devotion. Afterwards the Granth Saheb was sent back to Kartarpur Saheb.

### *Dussehra*

Dussehra was an important festival in The kingdom. the celebrations lasted ten full days. The Maharaja mounted an elephant and paid visits to the parade ground. On the way he distributed largesse with both hands. Titles and honours were freely given on the occasion.

The Maharaja inspected his armed forces on the Dussehra day. A large tent was set up on the parade ground and regiment after regiment marched past the Maharaja. They included elephants, cavalry, artillery and soldiers on foot. Each regiment was preceded by its own banner and band.

### *Diwali*

Diwali was celebrated with equal gusto by all the communities, including the Muslims. Every home was lit with innumerable lamps

and sweets were distributed. According to the Punjab Government Records, Government employees were given special allowances for Diwali. The cavalry and foot soldiers were each given 5 rupees for the purchase of oil while artillery soldiers were given half of this amount. The poor were given oil free.

The Maharaja celebrated the festival with great enthusiasm. The court wore a festive look. Surrounded by his courtiers, the Maharaja witnessed singing and dancing by the most skilled courtesans of the kingdom.

### *Shab-e-barā't*

The Maharaja used to participate in these festivals with his Muslim subjects. A fair was held at the tomb of Fatehshah Sarisht and the Maharaja along with the princes attended it to offer *salaam*.

### *Muharram*

This is a day of mourning for Shia Muslims and it was observed every year in Ranjit Singh's kingdom. There were the usual processions and frequent conflicts between the Shias and the Sunnis. The Records in the Punjab archives reveal that in 1825 the Maharaja had ordered the city police chiefs to make sure that there was no violation of law and order.

All this shows that the Maharaja shared the joys and sorrows of his subjects. He was equally mindful of the welfare of the people and had issued orders to his officials that they must always act for the good of the people.

## *Successors of Ranjit Singh*

FOLLOWING THE DEATH of the Maharaja, a phase of anarchy set in the kingdom. Within a matter of just seven years all his sons except for Dalip Singh and Tara Singh, had been murdered. Prince Naunihal Singh, while on his way back from the funeral of his father Kharak Singh, was killed when an archway fell over him. Dalip Singh was exiled by the British in 1850 and for a time kept at Fatehgarh in U.P. Then in 1861 he was packed off to England. He came to India once to take his mother Jind Kaur to England. He again came to India in 1863 for her last rites. He had by then seen through the duplicity of the British. He started legal proceedings against the British. In 1886 he set out once again for India but was stopped at Aden, where once again he was baptised into the faith of his fore fathers. It may be remembered that he had been converted to Christianity, by the British. His mother inspired him to become a Sikh again. He died in Paris in 1893.

In Ranjit Singh's chronicles twenty of his Ranis are mentioned. Matrimony in those times was an important instrument of state policy.

The mother of Kharak Singh, the eldest Prince, was Raj Kaur. After her marriage with Ranjit Singh she was given the name Datar Kaur.

Mahtab Devi, also called Guddan, was the daughter of Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra. She was a painter and her palace showed her artistic taste.

Mahtab Kaur, who was the daughter of Gurbaksh Singh Kanahiya gave birth to Sher Singh, Tara Singh and Ishar Singh. Daya Kaur gave birth to Kashmira Singh and Pishora Singh. Ratan Kaur became the mother of Multan Singh.

Jind Kaur was the youngest and favourite Rani of Ranjit Singh. She was the mother of Dalip Singh. Of all the Ranis, Jind Kaur alone deserves a place in history. She was patriotic and freedom-loving. When the first war between the British and the Sikhs took place, she showed her determination to drive out the British from the country. After the conquest of Punjab the British authorities put her in prison in the fort of Chinar. She escaped and found her way to Nepal. In the 1857 war of independence she took a prominent part. In the end the British sent her off to England.

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Wade C.M. : Report on the Punjab  
Waheed-ud-din Syed : The Real Ranjit Singh

# Genealogy

S. Budh Singh (Died 1718)

(Earliest ancestor of Ranjit Singh, who had been baptised by Guru Gobind Singh)

Chanda Singh (ancestor of Sandhanwalias)

Naudh Singh (died 1752)  
 Charat Singh (died 1767)  
 Mahan Singh (died 1772)  
 Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839)

Dalip Singh (1837-93) Pishaura Singh (1844-?) Kashmira Singh (1819-43) Multan Singh (1819-46) Tara Singh (1807-1859) Sher Singh (1807-43) Kharak Singh (1801-40)

Victor Dalip Singh (1866-1918) Fredric Dalip Singh (1868-1926) Albert Edward Alexander Dalip Singh (1879-1893)

Shiv Dev Singh (He was also exiled alongwith Kanwar Dalip Singh)  
 Pratap Singh died alongwith Maharaja Sher Singh (D-1843)











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